

Authors Notes: Some things I thought I should mention about this story and will only say it once:

This story is AU and does not include Deathly Hollows. Any coincidences to DH are just that. This story includes Time Travel. This story contains Cutting and Thoughts of Suicide; don't like it, don't read it, no one's forcing you to. This story is Not Slash and has no concrete pairings. This story does have Character Death, don't worry I won't kill off Harry more than once... maybe. :)

Up front special thanks to my best friend, sister and muse, Aislyn Shadowsbane, for her wonderful ideas, constructive criticism and all around moral support.

## Harry Potter and the Difference of Time

Harry Potter's life has been an incredible journey, but his death will be even more incredible. Harry Potter dies and is sent back in time to rewrite his history. What will he change? What will he make sure never happens? How will he know what is the right path to follow when suddenly he can see everything clearly.

A/N: Not mine, the Harry Potter Universe as always belongs to J.K. Rowling and all the other affiliates.

## Prologue – The Past – The Future

The sun that filtered through the heavy dark clouds reflected off his circular glasses as he ran. A jagged scar, which looked much like the one that adorned his forehead, ran down the left side of his face, and although the wound was mostly closed, it still bled and stung irritably.

This was ignored as Harry Potter, the Boy-Who-Lived, the Protector of Hogwarts, and the last of the Golden Trio, pulled out the sword sheathed at his side. The sword was rather plain looking, but it was not an ordinary sword. It was goblin made and able to channel brief bursts of magic through its enchanted steel. It had been found in his family vault. At a few hundred years old, and belonging to the Potter family, it was the only weapon Harry had left. It was his last hope.

Until just a few days ago, he had been using Godric Gryffindor's sword, but it had been destroyed in his last fight along with his wand. The fight he had lost and run from. He would not lose this one! He couldn't.

Harry Potter swore on his magic and life that at all costs he would not fail. He had nothing left but his life now, his friends were dead, his family was dead, and even part of his soul was gone. Harry's silent oath was heard by no one, but something heard it as a blue hue momentarily flowed around him; sealing the oath, the promise to himself.

"Making oaths, Potter?" a voice hissed darkly, almost too quiet to hear over the short distance between them on the ruined grounds of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, where fighting seemed to come to a stop as the two enemies met for what everyone hoped would be the last time.

Harry slowed to a walk and then halted all together, his chest heaving, not from the exertion, but anger. "Oh yes!" Harry snarled, though it came out calmly. "And here's another one, My Lord," he spit out. "I swear on my magic and my life that you will be defeated!" Another swirl of blue magic flew around him, sealing the oath.

The Dark Lord laughed. "I think we've gone over this, Potter, I cannot be defeated!"

"I beg to differ, my Lord," Harry whispered as he circled the disgusting reptilian form that was Tom Riddle. Never once did he move his eyes away from him, even as his eyes blazed with fury and an aura of magic shown around him. "Your Horcruxes are gone," Harry hissed quietly. "I've accepted the full power of Protector. I've enhanced that power to a seductive amount and I've nearly lost myself in that power, all in the name of defeating you! You've taken my friends, my family!" he snarled. "THIS TIME I WILL NOT LOSE!" Harry shouted.

The Dark Lord only laughed harder and rather insanely. "It must be so frustrating for you. Watching your loved ones die and not being able to do a thing about it. It does not matter how much power you obtain, boy, it is the strength of will to use it that matters. Tell me this,

Harry. Can you cast the Killing Curse on me yet?" Harry just stared back as he continued to circle. "How about the Cruciatus Curse, Potter? The Imperious Curse mayhap, would that be more to your liking?"

The evil chuckle that met Harry's ears sent a chill down his spine, and his anger grew so much, his right hand and sword shook. "Shut up!" he said darkly, quietly.

"Your dear friend Ginevra seemed to like it very much when you were under it. As I remember she even screamed when you –"

"I said SHUT UP!" Harry screamed as he pointed the sword at the Dark Lord, the blade glowing with power as he started to pace back and forth in front of him.

"Tsk, tsk, Harry. Are we a bit angry with your failure to beat my Imperious Curse?"

Harry stopped dead, a darkness and a swirl of fire flashing over his eyes that seemed even to make the creature in front of him falter. "Stop talking, Riddle, or are you afraid to fight me?" Harry whispered coldly.

A sneer twisted the Dark Lord's rather none existent lips. "I should have taken the ability to speak that name from you as well," he muttered. "You will address me as My Lord!" he hissed as a thin silver sword appeared in his right hand and Harry's eyes widened fearfully. That sword Harry had sworn was destroyed first of all the founder's artifacts, the Scimitar of Salazar Slytherin. It was not a good thing to be seeing that sword.

Harry growled as he looked at his gifted sword in his enemy's hand. "Very well, My Lord; lets end this!"

"So eager to die... as you wish." The Dark Lord bowed slightly and then moved at an incredible speed towards Harry, the sword raised. Harry met him, and in a shower of sparks, the battle began and in three swift strikes, ended.

Harry blinked in surprise and shock as the sword plunged into his chest, he didn't even notice the pain that he thought should accompany a sharp piece of metal going through him. He looked down at the sword that held a piece of his fractured soul, and then looked up into the red eyes of the man that held the handle of it. The Dark Lord looked just as shocked as Harry felt, but his shock was quickly replaced with a cruel smirk and a glint of triumph. He tore the sword back out, Harry gasped and staggered back, and then fell to the ground as blood quickly soaked his shirt and began to pool around him.

"In what way did you ever think you could defeat me? You see, Harry Potter, as I told you before; your fight against me is useless. You should have joined me. You are dead and it is a meaningless death. Just like your friends before you, just like your family." The Dark Lord loomed over Harry and watched as Harry looked up at him with tears in his eyes as he breathed shallowly.

Blood welled in Harry's throat, cutting his diminishing air supply. He couldn't go like this; he hadn't beaten the Dark Lord yet. He glared with pain-filled eyes up at the monster, though his sight was quickly dimming. Harry still held the Potter sword clasped tightly in his grasp and he focused on the familiar weight. He slowly lifted it with a shaking hand and Riddle laughed lightly as his hand fell back down under the weight.

"It is no use, Harry, you haven't the strength to go on fighting," he said quietly, almost soothingly. It almost sounded as if there was sympathy in his voice as he watched the savior of the Wizarding World choke to death on his own blood. He knelt down next to Harry, his hand still resting on the hilt of Slytherin's bloodied sword. "Perhaps, Harry, in another life, we will meet again and not be enemies, but allies," he hissed.

A last bit of anger came to Harry's eyes. "Never!" he gasped out and blood ran down his chin. Harry clenched his teeth and pushed the last of his magic, which was sustaining his life, into the sword and swung as hard as he could with what strength he had left.

He did not see the sword catch the Dark Lord across the throat, but he did see the fear in his red eyes as the blade briefly met resistance against Slytherin's and then cut cleanly through it. As Riddle fell, his life quickly drained out of him with the blood that flowed from the wound.

Harry looked over to the dying Dark Lord as he himself plunged further into death's embrace. "N-now," he choked, tears coming to his vivid green eyes and blood now running freely from the corners of his mouth. "Now, m-my death m-means s-something; n-now, we're b-both dead..." Harry's last breath left his lips in a choked gasp and his body went limp as he closed his eyes for the last time, not hearing nor caring about the gurgling noise that came from the Dark Lord's futile attempts to speak. He was tired and he was finished. He had done what he was destined to do. Now he could finally rest...

--

A/N: Prologue, as always, rather confusing, but what do you think anyways?

## Chapter One – The Philosopher's Stone

Harry slowly opened his eyes and looked around him, at the solid stone floor, the walls, the ceiling? Hadn't he just been on the front lawn of Hogwarts? That was when he realized he was floating. His eyes widened. Yes, he was definitely floating, just above the ground, and he was... see-through? Was he a ghost? By Merlin, he was! No, this isn't what he wanted, he wanted to see Hermione and Ron and... and... everyone.

Where in hell was he? Everything was very fuzzy; he knew he was indoors, that was about all he knew. Harry shook his head. It didn't take long but his vision soon cleared. He looked around himself again. The chamber he was in looked awfully familiar, but he couldn't place it. He glanced to the floor below him and froze, his ghostly eyes widening even more with shock.

"What the...?" Harry asked aloud, his voice reverberating in the chamber.

There was a small black haired boy lying on the floor below him. He knew that boy, why did he know that boy? Harry floated down to the floor to get a closer look, which was when he noticed the mirror. The Mirror of Erised; the name came to him from out of nowhere and memories of his youthful past came flooding back to him. The last time he'd seen that mirror was... Harry's forming smile dropped; was he in the chamber where the Philosopher's Stone had been kept.

That was when it dawned on him, but it couldn't be possible. He looked down at the boy again and he knew it to be true. He was in the past! That boy was him! He'd heard when you died that your life flashed before your eyes, but this was bloody ridiculous! He was floating over his eleven-year-old self! He was really small...

Harry shook his head to clear his drifting thoughts. "Merlin, being a ghost is irritating. Hermione would hate this..." Harry trailed off, thinking about his friends who had died before him. Harry closed his eyes briefly and then opened them again. He needed to figure out what was going on. "If I am above myself, in the Chamber of the Philosopher's Stone, would that mean...?" Yes, the Philosopher's

Stone was still there and clenched in the boy's small hand. But where was Dumbledore?

Harry looked around himself again. Shouldn't Dumbledore be there by now? Hadn't he told him that he had arrived just in time to pull Quirrell off him? Harry suddenly gasped and floated backwards as he saw another body, not too far from his own.

"Professor Quirrell?"

The man had scorch marks all over him. He was still slightly smoking and had his badly burned face in his burnt hands. The Dark Lord was gone, he knew because the two faced professor was lying faced down on the stone floor, dead.

Harry furrowed his brow. Had he killed him? Harry remembered it now, vaguely, but why hadn't Dumbledore told him? And why hadn't he remembered before? Dumbledore promised him that he had no other secrets hidden from him. He swore just before his death that... He'd lied to him! Harry stamped his foot in anger; though hitting air, it did little good. He instead crossed his legs Indian style and crossed his arms over his chest.

Had he not just woken up as a ghost, he would not be pouting just now, but at the moment, he didn't rightly care. He was supposed to be happily with his parents and friends by now. Reminiscing on what their lives had been like and how much better it was to be dead. But no, he was a ghost, and apparently in the past as well.

Harry looked down at Quirrell again and scowled. Had he known that he had killed before, he would never have had such a problem killing Voldemort. He probably would have been traumatized from knowing, but he could have dealt with that. As it was it had taken the deaths of his best friends, his family, and his torture before Harry had gathered the strength of will to do it, and he'd died in the process. But he had always known that he wouldn't live through their final encounter and that had been even more cemented when he had seen Slytherin's sword in the Dark Lord's hand. Harry looked around himself in thought. What was the point of returning as a ghost in the past? What

could he possibly change as a ghost? Harry ran a transparent hand through his transparent hair and sighed.

He was still floating over his eleven-year-old self a half an hour later, waiting for Dumbledore to arrive and figure out why in hell he was here. He was also waiting for his younger self to wake up, but something told him that he wasn't going to and he didn't know how he felt about that. So he chose not to think about it at all.

Instead, Harry spent his time learning a new trick as a ghost. He could conjure playing cards. He was currently losing at Solitaire, nothing new with that. Even with a Wizard's deck, he'd never won. As the time wore on though, his mind grew loopier. He'd been having a theological debate in his head for the last ten minutes. He still didn't understand the concept of Heaven and Hell. It just didn't make any sense to his ghostly mind. Furthermore, if he were to cheat at Solitaire as a ghost, would he go to Hell? And if so, shouldn't Peeves have gone there a long time ago for all the problems he'd caused?

Harry chuckled to himself, shook his head at his useless thoughts, and made his deck of cards disappear. He looked down at his young clone and saw something he hadn't noticed before. The Philosopher's Stone was cracked, or rather nearly crushed. Harry cocked his head and floated down to take a closer look. As he did, he glanced at the mirror. It was also smashed. Had it been that way before? Yes, he just hadn't taken any notice. Harry curiously looked back to the stone and saw that fragments were embedded into his younger self's right palm.

"Ouch." That certainly hadn't happened last time, had it? What if it was something else Dumbledore had hidden from him? He had said the stone had been destroyed, though he had never said how.

Still used to the mortal existence, and curious as all hell, Harry instinctively reached out to poke at his younger self's hand. He didn't even have a moment's thought of recoiling as his hand passed through the adolescent Harry's hand and through the stone. The stone glowed deep red, blood red, and before he could even register the tingling sensation he was feeling, Harry was suddenly pulled forward



into his younger self; eyes wide and with a look of surprise on his face.

--

Harry sat bolt upright in bed, his eyes as wide as they could be, and breathing heavily. A hand gently touched his shoulder and he recoiled and jumped off the bed and spun around. He reached for his wand, in the holster on his left forearm that he was never without since before Hermione and Ron's deaths, but it wasn't there, neither was the holster. "What... where?" Harry gasped and then grasped at his chest as memories assaulted him. He had been killed. He had been a ghost... He... had...

Harry slowly lifted up his small shaking hands to eye level and gazed at them in awe. They weren't his hands, but they were, just much younger, and there were no scars that Harry could see and he had use of all of his fingers, he had all his fingers! Harry slowly looked at the rest of him.

"How in hell?" he whispered and then jumped again when a hand touched his arm. He instinctively spun away as his preservation instincts took over for his shocked mind. He didn't even look to see who it was, as he prepared to gather the magic around him to cast a wandless spell.

"Harry, are you all right?" a worried, very familiar voice asked. Harry froze.

"Dumbledore...?" Harry whispered, pleaded, his eyes still wide with shock. It couldn't be. Harry shook his head and backed away. He was dead; he'd seen him die. But if he really were in the past – Everyone would be alive! Harry squinted and focused his eyes on the old wizard. It was him! "Impossible," Harry shook his head again. He grabbed his head with his hands and squeezed his eyes shut. "This can't be real. This can't be true," he argued with himself.

"Mister Potter, what are you doing out of bed?" Madam Pomfrey screeched from the other side of the Hospital Wing and Harry's head shot up at the sound.

“Madam Pomfrey?” If she was also alive, did that mean...? “Hermione, Ron!” Harry very nearly yelled and sprinted bare footed towards the infirmary doors. He didn’t get two feet before he found himself unable to move any further. He tried to shake the freezing spell off just as Remus had shown him after Dumbledore’s death, but he couldn’t summon the energy needed to overcome the spell. Anger shot through his senses and tears sprung to his eyes as he was sorely reminded of the night he couldn’t prevent Dumbledore from dying because he wasn’t strong enough.

“Harry, calm down, I assure you that Miss Granger and Mister Weasley are both well and will be most relieved that you have come around. They have been extremely worried.”

Harry found himself released almost immediately and he sunk to his knees as memory after memory of the last months flooded his mind. He clamped his hands around his head again as if to stop them and sobs suddenly wracked his body. His responsibilities given to him by the school flashed through his mind, a cruel reminder of the subsequent betrayal of the Wizarding World. The death of his friends followed the death of his family; his capture and Ginny’s death; the last straw! He couldn’t get any of it out of his head. He wanted it to all stop. He didn’t want to remember any of this! Why couldn’t he just have stayed dead!

Harry screamed and pounded his fist on the stone floor, magic spread out from where his fist landed and spider cracks formed in the stone. He took in a deep shuddering breath to calm himself and then another. Piece by piece, he implemented his limited Occlumency training. He was horrid at Occlumency, but he could use it to at least get a grip and calm himself down enough to assess the situation.

“Calm down, Harry,” he told himself. “Come on, for Slytherin’s sake get a grip.” Do as Hermione always did, think logically. You’re in the past; you know this. You don’t know how, you don’t know why. Just accept it and move on like you have always done with everything else in your dismal life!

"Harry, you've had a trying ordeal, but you must calm down. Everything is all right now," Dumbledore said soothingly with concern in his voice. He didn't touch Harry this time and he kept his distance, Harry was thankful for that.

After a few moments, Harry snapped his head up. "I'm fine. I'm fine," Harry repeated, nodding his head and then something in his memory made sense to him... just clicked. "The stone!" he declared and then promptly passed out.

--

When Harry groggily woke up next, it was to the arguing of his two best friends. He grinned weakly at the sight, it wasn't just that they were alive; it was the same old Ron and Hermione, they never changed. Harry's eyes saddened and a frown came to his lips. They should have, they should have turned their backs on him when he tried to push them away, but they hadn't and they'd paid a high price for that.

Harry smiled slightly as they continued to bicker. They were so cute; he'd almost forgotten what they were like at this age, what they were all like, so innocent, so carefree... "And it only gets worse from here on out," Harry murmured as he shook his head and yawned. His friends continued to argue, oblivious to him. He stretched; he felt like his energy had been ripped from him and then shoved back into him again. Maybe he felt that way because his soul had done that of a sort.

Harry felt a bit disparaged at the thought that it was going to take him forever to get back all the muscle he'd gained, not to mention the magic. Ah, well, his friends were alive. He was alive. Somehow fate had given him another chance at life and he wasn't about to blow it, though he had to wonder why?

Harry reached for his glasses on the stand beside him, ignoring the tingling sensation that ran up his limbs, as if they'd been asleep for a long time and were just now waking up. He brushed his hand over his wand at the same time. His hand recoiled in disgust almost instantly. He'd snapped that wand after Ginny... Harry shook his head to clear

it. It hadn't happened yet. He could prevent it... but wasn't changing the timeline dangerous? Wasn't that what Hermione had said? What could happen if he did, what would happen? Everything would change.

Harry was so zoned out in his thoughts that he hadn't noticed that Hermione and Ron had stopped bickering until Hermione screeched his name and threw her arms around him. Harry was instantly snapped out of his memories and he briefly hugged the bushy haired girl back.

"Oh, Harry, we were sure you were going to..."

"Die," Harry finished for Hermione in a flat tone before he could stop himself. Ron and Hermione only nodded, both looking away from him. Harry realized that he had just brought their worst fears to surface with that one simple word and he decided that he needed to lighten the mood a little for his young minded friends. He'd have to be more careful with what he said in the future.

Harry forced himself to laugh a little. "But hey, I'm fine, look no broken bones or anything." The two laughed as Harry waved his arms around wildly. "Now if only I could do something about my eyesight, for all I know I could be looking at Crabbe and Goyle using voice changing charms."

"Honestly, Harry, we haven't even learned that spell yet. We don't learn that till fifth year, our Ordinary Wizarding Level examination year," Hermione lectured as she handed Harry his glasses.

"Please, don't tell me you are going to go on about the O.W.L.'s now. We're only first years Hermione, we have four more years till we have to worry about those," Ron complained.

"Oh, honestly, Ronald, you can never be too prepared," she said in a huff and crossed her arms over her chest.

"She's right you know. You can never be too prepared," Harry said with a faraway look in his eyes. They could all have been a little more prepared...

"Don't tell me you're taking her side," Ron grumbled. Hermione scowled at Ron and Harry laughed out loud. The two looked at him skeptically, but before they had a chance to say anything Dumbledore entered into the Hospital Wing. Harry's smile left him for a moment as he remembered the Headmaster as he was struck down by Snape's Killing Curse; so weak, so vulnerable.

"Ah, Harry, you are awake. You gave us all quite a scare," the Headmaster said as his eyes sparkled merrily. Harry's smile brightened. He had missed those eyes. The last time he had seen Dumbledore's eyes sparkle like that was the day the man had died, before he had drunk the poison to get at the fake Horcrux. Harry caught himself before he could zone out again in memories. Memories of events that hadn't happened yet, he reminded himself.

"Hello, Professor. Sorry about that, how long have I been unconscious for? The last thing I remember was..." Harry stopped; he couldn't very well say that the last thing he remembered was being a ghost and reaching out to his younger body and then waking up and having a panic attack in the Hospital Wing. "T-the last thing I remember was Professor Quirrell trying to get the stone from me," Harry lied as evenly as he could, without looking at Dumbledore, he just hoped his frown didn't give him away. He was never good at lying to Dumbledore, to anyone really.

"Four days. I arrived just in time to pull him off you –" Harry's frown deepened as anger suddenly washed over him. You're lying, Harry thought to himself. Had it been a lie the last time as well? "I feared I might be too late." You were.

"You nearly were," Harry mumbled as he remembered what he had said the last time and repeated it. He was sure now that his younger self must have died; it was the only way Harry could think of that would allow him to enter his younger self's body. "I couldn't have kept him from the stone much longer," Harry said in a monotone voice.

"Not the stone, boy..." Harry tensed involuntarily. "...you – the effort involved – you were nearly killed. For one terrible moment, I was

afraid you had been.” Dumbledore said seriously. “As for the stone, it has been destroyed.”

Harry’s eyes widened; of course, he had destroyed the stone, this time and the last, he wasn’t sure how, but he had. That was when he thought of poor Nicolas Flamel and his wife. “Honestly, Professor, I didn’t mean to. I don’t know how it happened. I think it happened when I – but I didn’t mean to do it. I really didn’t,” Harry said, suddenly distraught, “– and the mirror, it was just...” he muttered, not looking at anyone, but around at everyone at the same time.

“Harry, please calm down. I was not aware that you remembered that.”

Harry’s eyes hardened and he lowered them to look at his hands; he had killed Quirrell. Harry suddenly wondered if Dumbledore was going to hide that too. After a moment as the Headmaster remained silent, Harry voiced the question. But he found it hard as he really realized that he had killed someone other than Riddle, consciously. “You weren’t going to tell me if I didn’t remember were you? You weren’t going to tell me that I had killed...” Harry hid his face in his hands as his voice choked. He heard his two friends gasp with his declaration.

“I had hoped that you wouldn’t remember,” Dumbledore said honestly. “Taking a life is always a hard thing to do and to live with,” he said somberly as he placed his hand on Harry’s shoulder. Harry flinched slightly as Dumbledore’s hand came precariously close to the base of his neck, but didn’t pull away. He was in the past; the curse scar hadn’t been made yet.

Hermione and Ron both stood by in shock. Harry slowly lifted his head and looked at his friends, the most important people in his life, even as young as they still were. “You don’t hate me do you?” Harry directed the question at his silent friends.

Tears came to Hermione’s eyes and Ron’s expression hardened. “Of course not, Harry. You did what you had to,” Ron said adamantly. “We all did.”

“Ron’s right. You would have d-died had you not,” Hermione sniffed and wiped her tears away.

Harry wanted to say that he had died, that he wasn’t their Harry Potter; he was from a future so bleak that no man would want it. He felt slightly guilty for taking their Harry’s place, as if it was somehow his fault, but then he realized that he was their Harry, they were the same soul, the same past.

“If you don’t want anyone to know what really happened down there, we won’t tell anyone,” Ron said suddenly and Harry smiled slightly. This was why they were his friends; they always accepted him, no matter what.

Harry was about to nod his agreement when Dumbledore spoke. “I think that would be best Mister Weasley. Harry already has enough attention. In fact I believe it would be best if no one knew about this, not even your parents.” Dumbledore looked over his glasses at Ron intently and then Hermione. The two nodded back. Dumbledore smiled at them. “Now, let’s give Harry some time to rest shall we?”

Hermione hugged Harry tightly before she left and Ron clasped him on the back. Dumbledore waited until the two were gone before he turned on Harry with a serious expression. Harry looked up at the aged Headmaster, suddenly angry with the old man. “Why’d you lie to me? Is there something else you’re not telling me? V-Vol –” Harry winced and clenched his teeth as pain shot through him; maybe the curse was still there... Harry regretfully amended his sentence. “You-Know-Who, he...”

“Call him Voldemort, Harry.” Harry breathed in deeply as another shock ran down his spine and he shook his head to rid himself of the pain.

“No, and don’t ask me to again,” Harry said severely. Dumbledore looked at him worriedly, but Harry cut off any questions he might have had. “He said that my mother only died to protect me. Why was he after me in the first place? I was only a baby!”

Harry decided that playing it safe with the timeline was going to be thrown out the window. He wanted to see if Dumbledore would keep the Prophecy from him if asked about it. He knew it would be changing the future, but he didn't care. Screw the future. It didn't exist yet. It could be changed. He could change it!

"Harry that is something I cannot tell you, not yet..."

"You think I'm too young don't you? You think I won't be able to handle it, whatever it is," Harry accused. "Well I can. I may only be eleven, but I'm not a normal eleven year old –" Dumbledore raised his hand to silence him and Harry was relieved that he hadn't caught Harry's slip.

"Harry, when Madam Pomfrey changed you out of your clothing, she noticed several scars, scars that could not be normal childhood injuries. Two of these scars were new and had been made within the last month or so."

Harry looked at Dumbledore in confusion, what was he talking about? The only scars he had when he was eleven, besides his curse scar, were a few barely noticeable ones that he had gotten over the years from his uncle and cousin.

"What scars," Harry asked quietly as he thought about the scars he had before he died. Several of them self inflicted, but not so many as what had been given to him by the Dark Lord. In fact, one of them was a painful reminder why he no longer said his name, or even thought it. Could that be one of the scars? But no that one was permanently under a glamour; if it could be seen, he'd be able to say the Dark Lord's name.

"These scars, Harry," Dumbledore said seriously, as he pushed up his pajama sleeves on his right and left arms. Harry looked down at the long matching scars on his forearms and his already pale complexion got even whiter. These scars he'd done himself with Godric Gryffindor and Salazar Slytherin's swords. They were curse scars and had obviously followed him into the past, but the magic he had gotten from them, where was that? He didn't feel it there.



Harry shook his head and looked away from Dumbledore as he pulled his arms towards him, hiding the blood ritual scars against him. What could he tell Dumbledore? That he didn't know how he'd gotten them. Even if he used his best bold-faced lie, the Headmaster would see through it. He had given them to himself to be more powerful, and the power had nearly destroyed him.

"And this one, Harry," Dumbledore reached out and touch one on the back of his neck and Harry screamed in agony and jumped away from him, right out of the bed and clear to the other side of the infirmary.

"Don't!" Harry yelled, panting in pain as he slid down the wall and drew his knees up to his chest, shaking slightly with aftershocks. "Don't..." he whispered breathing in deeply.

Dumbledore calmly walked over to Harry. "Where did you get these scars, Harry?" he asked gently, kneeling down beside him, worry in both his voice and his eyes.

Harry looked up to the old man, but didn't meet his blue eyes that lacked their customary twinkle. "I did them. I needed to. Please, I don't want to talk about them."

"This – the one at the base of your neck, that's a curse scar. How did you get it, Harry?" Dumbledore asked, though his voice was gentle it was demanding.

Harry lowered his eyes from Dumbledore. "I – From Vol..." Harry bit back a curse. "You-Know-Who," he spit out and then jumped to his feet. "I don't want to talk about it!"

"Harry..."

"I don't want to talk about it!" Harry repeated, nearly yelled. "Please don't make me. I'm fine, the ones on my arms won't happen again and – and the one on my neck doesn't matter..."

Dumbledore looked as if he was about to protest again but then sighed heavily. "Very well, assuming Madam Pomfrey says you are fit,

you can come to the farewell feast.” Dumbledore made to leave the Hospital Wing, but stopped just before the door and turned back. Harry saw what could only be described as disappointment in his aged eyes. “When you are ready to talk, know that I’ll always be here to listen,” Dumbledore said and then left.

“No you won’t,” Harry whispered and a suppressed tear slid down his cheek as he watched him go. “But you will be. I won’t let you die again, not when I can prevent it.”

--

A/N: Here you go, the first chapter, and the story really begins.

## Chapter Two – Unexpected Truce

Harry couldn't help the sense of déjà-vu as he walked alone down to the end-of-year feast. He had meant to be out of the Hospital Wing before, so he could walk down with his friends, but Madam Pomfrey wouldn't let him go. She insisted he talk about his scars. He firmly kept his mouth shut for over an hour before the nurse finally gave up in exasperation. She almost didn't let him go to the feast at all, but Harry had argued that she couldn't keep him there forever and that he was fine. She had reluctantly let him leave and he had quickly scrambled away before she could change her mind.

Harry peeked into the Great Hall, which was of course, already full. The Slytherin colors ruled the Hall and Harry smirked when he remembered that it wouldn't be staying that way, not after Dumbledore gave out the last house points anyway. Harry looked in at all the faces. Some he had seen killed within the last few months. Harry blinked back tears knowing their fates, a fate, which would now never come, if Harry had anything to say about it.

The scars on his arms were proof enough for him. He was still Protector of Hogwarts. He had found out the summer after his sixth year, when he had come back to Hogwarts on his pursuit for Severus Snape, when he should have been looking for Horcruxes. The legend of the Protectors was common knowledge, even better known than that of the Founders' stories. As far as it was known, they were chosen at random for their loyalty to the school. No one knew how they were chosen, only that the magic of Hogwarts deemed them worthy.

However, every known Protector had turned against the school; every known Protector had given in to the luring power granted them and turned into a Dark Wizard. The last was unknown, but Harry had suspicions that Tom Riddle had been one as well. Harry had yet to tap into the full power of the Protectors that he had once invoked, and he would never do so if it meant him turning into a Dark Wizard. He would also never tell anyone that he was Protector as he had seen firsthand what the Wizarding World thought of them.

Harry thought about getting his invisibility cloak and sneaking in under it, but instead he walked into the Hall and tried to ignore the stares. As had happened the last time, the Hall fell silent as Harry walked down the rows and sat between Ron and Hermione. As they had before some stood up to get a better look at him and talk went up and down the hall with him as the focal point.

Harry smirked. "You'd think that I'd just won the Tri-Wizard tournament," he mumbled under his breath.

"What's the Tri-Wizard tournament, Harry?" Hermione asked beside him.

Harry shook his head. "Never-mind," he said quickly and turned to Ron. "Want to bet that Professor Dumbledore gives us some last minute points for saving the stone from Quirrell?" He said, changing the topic from his slip of tongue.

"Harry, we could have gotten ourselves killed, you nearly did. He's not going to reward us for that. What we did was very foolish," Hermione argued.

"Hermione, if Dumbledore wants to give us points for saving the stone, he's more than welcome to, and we shouldn't complain. Besides, even if he does, there's no way that he's going to give us enough points to beat Slytherin. We're in last place," Ron said morosely and leaned his chin on his crossed arms on the table.

"Yeah, Ron's right," Seamus Finnigan sighed depressingly, as he dropped in from the other side of the table where he was sitting next to Dean Thomas.

Hermione glared at him but didn't get a chance at a comeback as Dumbledore rose from his seat. "Another year gone!" said Dumbledore cheerfully, but not as cheerfully as Harry remembered him being the last time, and he could swear he saw the old man glare at him as his eyes swept the hall. "And I must trouble you with an old man's wheezing waffle before we sink our teeth into our delicious feast. What a year it has been! Hopefully your heads are all a little

fuller than they were...you have the whole summer ahead to get them nice and empty before next year starts....

“Now as I understand it, the house cup here needs awarding, and the points stand thus: In fourth place, Gryffindor, with three hundred and twelve points; in third, Hufflepuff, with three hundred and fifty-two; Ravenclaw has four hundred and twenty-six and Slytherin, four hundred and seventy-two.”

As before Slytherin erupted in cheers and Harry rolled his eyes and looked back up to Dumbledore, knowing that he wasn't finished. He didn't even glance at the adolescent Draco Malfoy, as he was already having a hard time keeping himself from getting up and throttling the boy, let alone hexing Severus Snape who was clapping along with his house. He'd deal with them in time. They wouldn't be causing the pain that they had his past year, in the future.

“Yes, yes, well done, Slytherin,” Dumbledore said and the cheers quieted. “However, recent events must be taken into account.” The Hall fell silent and the Slytherin's smiles disappeared. Harry smirked and Ron and Hermione looked at Harry curiously. “I have a few last minute points to award. Let me see. Yes...

“First – to Mr. Ronald Weasley for the best-played game of chess Hogwarts has seen in many years, I award Gryffindor House fifty points.”

Harry smiled as Ron's face turned nearly purple and he slapped him on the back along with many Gryffindors around him, and cheers came loudly from the table. But Harry knew Dumbledore wasn't finished and halted his own celebrating as he looked up at Dumbledore again.

Finally, the hall fell silent and Dumbledore continued. “Second – to Miss Hermione Granger, for the use of cool logic in the face of fire, I award Gryffindor House fifty points.”

Hermione stared up at Dumbledore, her mouth agape and Harry hugged her shoulders as cheers came from the Gryffindor table again,

this time even more loudly as they were now a hundred points up from when the feast had started.

They eventually fell silent as Dumbledore raised his hand. "Third – to Mr. Harry Potter..." Dumbledore stopped; his smile not as bright as it had been and Harry looked up at him curiously. "To Harry Potter, for outstanding courage in the face of great peril, I award Gryffindor House fifty points."

Though the noise was again deafening, Harry sat staring at Dumbledore. Ron patted him on the back, but Harry didn't react. This was not how it had happened last time. Last time he had gotten sixty points and it had tied them with Slytherin, but now they were still down ten points...

"There are all kinds of courage," Dumbledore began and the hall fell silent once more. "It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends. I therefore award ten points to Mr. Neville Longbottom." The Hall was shocked into silence, waiting for Dumbledore to continue, even as Neville stared up at the headmaster, himself in shock.

"We're tied with Slytherin," Hermione whispered beside him and Harry nodded. Yes they were. But would Dumbledore let the tie stand? Never had there been a tie for the House Cup, at least not for over a hundred years and then there were only rumors.

"Which means," Dumbledore called over the non-cheers from the Gryffindor table and the already silent hall did the impossible and grew even more silent. "We need a little change in decoration. Never have I seen two houses tied for the house cup and it is an honor to Hogwarts and me to see it so."

Dumbledore clapped his hands once and one side of the hall turned to the Gryffindor red and gold, while the other side stayed the Slytherin green and silver. Where the banner of Slytherin had hung behind the High Table was now a tapestry that Harry had only seen once before and he stood up looking at it as if he were seeing a ghost that didn't belong. He had last seen it when he had become Protector. The tapestry was of a large snake coiled loosely around a golden

roaring lion. It represented unity between the two rival houses and Harry had to smile at it.

"I can't believe we're tied with Slytherin," Ron grumbled and several other Gryffindors nodded in agreement, he looked up at Harry. "Harry, what's wrong?"

Harry looked down at his friend, the smile still on his face and a faraway look in his eyes. "It's not so bad, Ron." Ron looked at Harry as if he'd grown a second head. "Being tied means we didn't lose. I'd rather share the cup with them then lose it to them."

"But, Harry, they're Slytherin's; you know they won't see it as winning, look they're already starting to complain." Ron pointed at the Slytherin table and Harry looked over, sure enough, they were.

Harry shook his head. It was a shame that it had to take the beginnings of the downfall of Hogwarts for the houses all to start working together. This was insane and they would probably call him an attention seeker for it, but the rivalry had to stop. It was just going to cause more problems for everyone. Besides, Harry was the Protector of all of Hogwarts.

"Harry, where are you going?" Hermione asked, Harry didn't answer; he didn't want his friends to stop him. Several heads followed his progress to the Slytherin table, including all of the staff.

Harry walked up to a Slytherin fifth year Prefect and held out his hand to him. The boy looked at Harry oddly. "I wanted to say congratulations. It is an honor to tie for the House Cup with Slytherin House. I for one think it should happen more often." The boy gapped at him for a minute, a minute in which the majority of the Hall had fallen silent again, and then he took Harry's hand and shook it a smile coming to his face.

Another Slytherin beside him also shook Harry's hand and then another. Harry smiled at them and caught Draco out of the corner of his eye. The boy looked to be fighting between shaking Harry's hand like the older students and sneering at his attempt to stop the house

rivalry, instead he just sat there with a perplexed expression on his face.

Another Gryffindor, a prefect, came up to the Slytherin table and taking Harry's example, shook the nearest Slytherin's hand. It wasn't long before more followed. Not all of Gryffindor and Slytherin participated, but it was a start.

Harry glanced up at the Headmaster and saw him slowly sitting down, a bright sparkle in his eyes and a brilliant smile on his face. Harry bet the old wizard never thought he'd ever see a day like this and it was a guarantee that no one would ever forget this night.

--

Harry stood on Platform Nine and Three Quarters with his trunk sitting beside him and Hedwig perched on top of it. He watched as his friends lugged their trunks off the train. He tried to fight the tears that threatened to spill from his eyes. The last time he had seen a sight like this was weeks before his friends had been killed.

"Hey, Harry, give me a hand a second?" Ron yelled from the train and Harry laughed at the sight of his best friend being over taken by his school trunk. Harry wiped his sleeve over his eyes and rushed to help his friend, just as others started to complain about the way being blocked for so long. Harry helped Ron out and soon the trunk was sitting beside his.

"Honestly, Ronald, you could have hurt yourself trying to pick your trunk up like that," Hermione scolded, and Fred and George, who had both just dragged their trunks over, snickered.

"I didn't mean to, Hermione. Scabbers kept rattling his cage and almost made me drop him," Ron defended and held up the cage. Harry took one look at the rat and saw red. He nearly jumped at the cage, but Neville knocked into him and made the contents of his bag spill out onto the platform. This was the first time he'd seen Wormtail since before his death.



Neville dropped down to help Harry pick up his bag as did Hermione, and by the time Harry got his things back together, Ron and the rest of the Weasley family, including the rat were already heading off the platform. "Thanks," Harry told the two in a tight voice and shouldered his bag. He grabbed his trunk and Hedwig's cage and headed for the barrier himself, with Hermione and Neville following behind, both glancing at each other behind Harry's back and then back at Harry.

It took a while, but Harry finally managed to get off the platform and what greeted him were three people he'd never thought he'd see again. They may have made his life miserable, but he was actually glad to see them alive and well. He'd never forget the sight of Uncle Vernon taking the Killing Curse that had been meant for him, even after his own son had died by the same wand. That had been the night he had been captured, the night he had lost Hermione and Ron. The battle had nearly destroyed Privet Drive, and had only lasted a few minutes, though it had seemed hours to Harry.

"Ready, are you?" Uncle Vernon asked gruffly as he eyed the multitude of red heads not too far away, with distaste.

Harry shook his head to clear his thoughts. "One moment, Uncle Vernon, I have just got to say goodbye to my friends," Harry said and walked the two feet to Ron.

"Harry, you must come and stay this summer," Ron said and then looked over Harry's shoulder. "Both of you," he told Hermione. "I'll send you an owl."

"Oh, umm, I'd be glad to come and stay, but you better not send an owl. Muggle post would be better. I think one owl around the house is enough for my relatives," Harry said, running his hand through his hair and glancing at the three Dursleys. "I might even send Hedwig to stay with you, Ron, at some point during the summer." Don't want her to get locked up again, Harry thought.

"Oh, yeah, sure mate," Ron grinned.

“Busy year,” Mrs. Weasley asked all of them and Harry caught himself before he could hug Mrs. Weasley. Instead, he settled for nodding.

Ginny was huddled close to her mother and was staring star struck at Harry. Harry caught himself from staring back. He reminded himself that this was not the same Ginny from the future; she was not the same Ginny he’d... Harry blinked back the tears and looked away.

“I’m so sorry, Harry, I keep telling her that you’re just like everyone else, that she shouldn’t stare...” Mrs. Weasley began.

“Oh,” Harry said, realizing what Mrs. Weasley thought of his actions. “It’s all right, Mrs. Weasley. I’m used to it. Thanks for the fudge and sweater, by the way. You really brightened up my Christmas,” Harry said smiling, though it was forced.

“Oh, it was nothing dear. You have a good summer.”

“I-I will,” Harry said and turned to Hermione and Ron. “I better get going. I’ll see you over summer,” he said quickly and walked back to his uncle, aunt, and cousin. “Remember, Muggle post please,” he said over his shoulder to his two friends and then started to walk away with his relatives, dragging his trunk behind him.

Harry looked back briefly over his shoulder at Ginny. He had a Diary to get, a Basilisk to slay, and a crazy, not-so-helpful House Elf to free, and he was determined to do it all before school started again. If he was going to change his future and the futures of his friends, he was going to go all out. He had a lot of work to do.

--

A/N: Thus ends chapter two.

## Chapter Three – Greatest of the Hogwarts Four

Harry sat on the front stoop of Number Four Privet Drive. He was rather deep in thought. He hadn't had much time to adjust to being eleven again and he hadn't given much thought as to how it had happened. But now he had much time to think, too much time to think.

The Dursleys were inside doing what they did best, ignoring him. Harry stared out into the street unseeingly, trying to remember every detail of how he had died and when he had arrived in the past. He remembered the broken mirror. But he was sure that had nothing to do with it. He had already figured out how he had gotten pulled into his body; the shards from the Philosopher's Stone.

Harry looked at his right palm. No one had noticed and Harry hadn't either until he was washing up that morning before breakfast. There were three blood red shards of the stone embedded just under the skin in the center of his palm. They formed a perfect triangle and were barely noticeable without a bright light. The lighting in the bathroom had made them visible, just as the afternoon sunlight was making them visible now. In the dark or dim, he couldn't tell they were there at all. He couldn't even feel them.

The Philosopher's Stone had pulled him into his body. It made sense as the stone gave life, not that Harry would be able to explain it any further than that. But it still didn't explain why he had become a ghost. Sure, he had loads of unfinished business, such as his whole life, but still he had nothing left to live for, not really. It was a sad fact, but he had been praying for death near the end. So why did he turn into a ghost instead of crossing over into full death? How did his ghost end up in the past for that matter? He was sure these questions would plague him for years to come.

"Boy!" Vernon shouted from within and Harry winced slightly before he lazily got to his feet. First thing was first, that name had to go. He had been back less than a week and already he couldn't take his relative's treatment of him any longer, even if in the end, they had given their lives for his.

Harry pulled his wand from his long sleeve shirt, just in case. He held loosely to it, still disgusted with it, with what he had done. It didn't feel right in his hand anymore, not like it used to. He'd taken to wearing long sleeves to hide his scars, he already had too many questions from Dumbledore and Madam Pomfrey; he didn't need any more. Harry was just glad other marks that had adorned his body hadn't followed him into the past. Harry would like to see himself try and explain those.

Harry opened the front door and walked in, calmly closing the door behind him. "Yes, Uncle Vernon?" Harry said monotone, his wand hidden behind his back.

"Petunia has a list of chores for you and I have a few myself," Vernon sneered, and handed out a piece of paper that was covered front and back in tiny handwriting, far too much for anyone to do in even a week, if they weren't a wizard that is.

Harry took the paper with his left hand and looked it over. He was about to complain, but then he smirked getting an idea, a trick to the system he just had to try out. "I'll have it done in an hour," Harry said nonchalantly and started to walk away, but turned back to his slack-jawed uncle. "Uncle Vernon, my name is Harry, by the way. Please don't call me boy, it's disrespectful." Harry walked away before his uncle had time to react. He knew that wouldn't be the last time he heard that from him, but it would soon be, even if he had to threaten his uncle into submission. Being called boy was one of the only things he wouldn't tolerate; it brought up too many bad, painful memories and he already had enough of those to contend with.

Harry walked up to Dudley's second bedroom, his room now. His trunk was only with him because he had lugged it up to his room faster than his uncle could think to lock it in the cupboard. Harry opened his trunk and pulled out his cauldron, and five ingredients. Thanking the Weasley twins for their brilliance. Apparently a simple modified Ageing Potion, the same one they'd used to attempt to get into the Tri-Wizard Tournament, would allow for underage wizardry, because technically and temporarily, he was of age. Sure, magic would be used at his residence, but who's to say he doesn't have an above aged friend?

Harry had always wondered something about the age monitoring. He'd seen kids younger than him at the Quidditch World Cup and Diagon Alley use small amounts of magic and hadn't gotten in trouble, except for maybe by their parents. It had always been a thought, a chancy thought, but what if because they were in such a high concentrated area of magic that they couldn't be monitored. Harry decided that he'd have to test that theory someday.

Harry had become rather... adept at brewing with Snape not looming over his shoulder, and he hoped to put his rather limited skills and memory to use in the man's Potion's class that year, but now he was on a mission. It didn't take long to prepare and make the potion and Harry smelled the nauseating concoction before he held his breath and downed a good quarter of a vial, much more than just the one-drop the Weasley twins needed. He felt a slight tingling, but otherwise nothing outward changed, though he would love to get the aftertaste out of his mouth.

Harry picked up his wand, the wand he had grown to hate and pointed it at his cauldron. "Now for the test, Scourgify," Harry cast the spell and his cauldron was swept clean a second later. Harry noted that the spell was rather low powered, not up to his usual standard, maybe because he wasn't of his majority yet. Harry held his breath and waited, and waited, and waited. Letting out his breath he laughed to himself. "Geniuses they really are geniuses," he said to himself; and with such simple ingredients as well.

Harry pointed his wand at the left over ingredients. "Pack," he said clearly with a flick of his wand and everything fell into his trunk neatly. He mentally thanked Tonks' for revealing that spell to him, and Mrs. Weasley for teaching it to him properly.

Harry grabbed the list from his bed and looked it over again. Practically skipping down the stairs, Harry went to the backyard. He first looked around himself carefully, to make sure no snoop neighbors were watching, and then he drew his wand through the air in an intricate pattern that he barely managed.

A simple rune formed in the lawn momentarily and then the entire lawn was cleanly cut a moment later. The plants were all weeded and several new growths were even visible. Harry smiled. It had been Hermione's insistence that he learn some basic runes. They hadn't come in handy in his past life, but he was sure to make use of them this time. Harry next pointed his wand at the fence, which painted itself, he did the same to the shed, and then he set about doing the rest of his chores before the potion wore off, making sure that he wasn't seen in the process.

Exactly an hour later, Harry sat down in the kitchen, just in time for dinner, with his list all checked off, and finished. He handed it to his uncle. "Finished, anything else I can help you with, Uncle Vernon?" Harry asked politely.

"That's impossible! There is no way anyone could have gotten through that list in an hour, boy!" Vernon stood up, but Harry just looked up at his uncle's reddening face with a cool glare in his eyes.

"You can certainly check my work, Uncle Vernon. Everything is done. And don't call me boy!" Harry said, hissing the last words angrily as a final warning before he stood up and left the kitchen, dinner forgotten.

Harry had a restless night, full of dreams and nightmares. He thought his total amount of actual sleep was maybe bordering on an hour, if that. The rest of the week wasn't any better for him, and to top it all off, he had nearly lost his cool with his Uncle. But somehow, he had managed to walk away before he had actually blown up, or blown something up.

By the next Monday, he was dragging himself through his chores, which he was doing the Muggle way, as his potion stores were running low. He didn't know his past would have such a huge effect on his subconscious; he'd never had such nightmares before, even after his capture... and torture. Sleep was something he desperately needed, but he was as well lacking the ingredients needed to make a Dreamless Sleep Potion, not to mention he didn't have the directions to do so and it was a very complicated potion.

As Harry finalized his plans to head back to Hogwarts and dispatch with the Basilisk, he was quickly losing his ability to think and do things with a rational mind. His lack of sleep was only the tip of the iceberg. He'd developed a slight fever, which constantly either had him way too hot or freezing and not even the Muggle medicine he'd pilfered from the bathroom cabinet was helping.

Harry stirred the contents of the cauldron a final time and blew out the flame under it. He ladled the finished potion and sniffed at it. It didn't smell as it should and the color was off slightly, but Harry, being tired and a little annoyed from an earlier incident with his uncle, gulped it down anyways and then he waited. The tingling sensation ran over him and he picked up his wand. "Wingardium Leviosa," he said quietly and tiredly and a nearby textbook floated into the air. Harry set it down.

After a few minutes of waiting, Harry declared he wasn't going to get an owl from the Ministry. He bottled some more of the potion before he cleaned his cauldron and replaced everything back into his trunk. Then he grabbed his Invisibility Cloak, his empty book bag, and the spare bottle of Ageing Potion, and walked out of his room. The house was empty except for him. His relatives had gone out for the day; all Harry had to do was make sure he was back before them. To his annoyance, this was the first day since he had gotten back that he could do this and have it go unnoticed. He was cutting it awfully close to the day Dobby was to arrive and try and make his home life more of a living hell.

Harry walked into the backyard and looked around briefly before he threw his Invisibility Cloak over himself and concentrated. His younger body was not going to like him for this, but he didn't want to take the chance of anyone recognizing him if he tried the Knightbus. He disappeared with a crack and reappeared in front of the gates of Hogwarts, where he was quite suddenly, violently sick.

It took a few minutes for Harry to recover from the Apparation, push himself unsteadily back to his feet, and check himself over. Luck was on his side; he hadn't Splinched himself or lost anything. Harry looked through the closed gates and up the lawn to the school.

“Hello Hogwarts,” he said and put his right hand on the gates. A brown glow emanated from the gates and then they slowly creaked open. Harry smirked slightly. Being Protector, even though he hadn’t been named yet, did have its advantages. Harry pulled the Invisibility Cloak tighter over himself and started up the lawn for the school.

As Harry pushed opened the Entrance Hall door, he could swear he saw someone following him, but when he looked back, there was no one there. Harry closed the door and continued silently to the second floor corridor. He walked the length stopping every now and then to look behind him. He still had a feeling that he was being followed, but he chalked it up to paranoia and the multitude of portraits that couldn’t see past his cloak.

Harry finally came to Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom and he looked over his shoulder once more before continuing inside. He pulled the cloak off, stuffed it into his bag, and then walked to the sink he knew opened the way into the chamber.

“What are you doing in here? This is a girl’s bathroom,” Myrtle said crossly from her floating position above him. Harry didn’t even glance at her.

He looked at the tap and the snake etched into it. “Open,” he commanded in Parseltongue. The familiar white light appeared and then the tap began to spin. There was a grinding sound and then slowly the sink disappeared into the floor, exposing the large pipe that led into the chambers below.

“Wow, how did you do that? Not even I knew that was there and I’m in the pipes quite often,” Myrtle said, twirling her hair around her finger and tilting her head sideways.

Harry smiled up at her. “I know a lot of things. Nice chatting with you.” Harry waved and jumped into the pipe without a second thought.

He wasn’t quite sure how he was going to pull this off, but somehow he’d make sure that the Basilisk would not be a problem anymore. Harry wiped his hands on his pants as he exited the slimy pipe. It was



even dirtier than he remembered it. Of course, there hadn't been a Basilisk using it all year.

Harry raised his wand and was about to use the Lumos Spell but suddenly the chamber was full of light from a row of torches that he had never noticed before. They led deeper into the tunnel, towards the main chamber. Harry raised an eyebrow and then followed it. There was no snakeskin this time, which meant that the Basilisk had shed it during the year, and of course, the passage way was free from rocks as there had been no cave-in. Though the ceiling was still cracked and looked rather dangerous in places.

It didn't take him long to reach the true entrance to the Chamber of Secrets and one simple, "open" in Parseltongue had the door opened. Harry looked into the chamber as torches lining the walls sparked to life. He moved into the chamber and down the rows of snake entwined pillars towards the giant image of Salazar Slytherin.

He stood at the base and chewed at his bottom lip in thought. His wand was gripped tightly in his hand from the memory of the first time he had been down here. Harry looked up and down the large statue. Here came one of the flaws in his plan, the last time he had been down here was when he was twelve, and he couldn't for the life of him remember what the younger Tom Riddle had said to open the mouth of Slytherin's statue.

"Open," he hissed... nothing. Well he was the only Parseltongue besides the Dark Lord; if he got rid of the Diary then no one would be down in the chamber at all. Problem solved, now why hadn't he thought of that before?

A cold shiver ran up his spine and Harry wrapped his arms around himself and turned to leave the chamber in annoyance from his useless trip. He'd gotten a couple of steps when he heard a hissing sound coming from behind him. "Heir of Slytherin, Greatest of the Hogwarts Four, do you seek entrance into the Chambers of Salazar?"

Harry stopped and very slowly turned around. He relaxed slightly when there was no one behind him. "The Chambers of Salazar?" he asked. This was new; he didn't know there were other rooms in the

Chamber of Secrets. There was no reply. "Um... yes," he tentatively hissed.

A sliding noise alerted him to the opening in the floor just before he dropped from the room above as the floor disappeared beneath his feet. He landed with an audible 'oomph' on a green-carpeted floor. Lights had lit all around him and that was when he noticed that he was in a large sitting room, and of course he noticed the stairs that led up to the chamber above. "Those would have been handy coming down," he mumbled.

Harry pushed himself off the floor and looked around. There were other rooms branching off the one he was in, but before he had a chance to choose one of the doors, a distinct slithering sound caught his attention. Harry spun around without thinking to be face to face with Slytherin's really large Basilisk. Harry fell backwards and looked wide-eyed at the large serpent. Then he realized that he wasn't dead, or dying, or even being maimed or eaten.

"Hello, young Heir of Slytherin. Do not be afraid I will not harm you," the Basilisk hissed and Harry nodded; his eyes still wide, and his hand tightening around his wand.

"Hello," Harry replied tightly as he got to his feet shakily.

"My name is Mortedolv, what are you called, Young Heir?"

Harry raised an eyebrow after spelling that in his head and wincing slightly at the mere thought. "He named you after himself?"

"If you are speaking of the one who thought he could control me, no. He stole my name and used it for his own. My master Salazar named me."

Harry wanted to laugh, the Dark Lord had named himself after Slytherin's pet. Had he thought the large snake would have found it funny he would have, but instead he kept it to himself. He didn't want to offend him while they were on such good terms. "Oh," Harry simply said back. "I'm Harry."

“It is good to meet you, Harry,” Mortedolv hissed. “Would you like to see the rest of the chamber?”

Harry thought about it for all of half a second, and then he nodded his head and put his wand away. This was an opportunity of a lifetime; of course he wanted to see the rest of the chamber. He couldn't believe he was calmly, well almost calmly; standing there talking to a Basilisk he had been forced to kill in his past. Harry shook his head to himself; best not to think about that.

Mortedolv moved past Harry and he followed him into another room, his eyes lit up at what he saw. He may never be as bookish as Hermione was, but he had to admit that even he would be spending much time in this Library. Harry could barely restrain himself from running to the copious volumes of books. Harry ran his hand along the spines in amazement. There weren't only Slytherin's writings, but the other Founders had placed something there as well. They were even divided into category, first by Founder and then by subject. These books were priceless and Harry was certain that the world hadn't seen any of these books since the Founders' themselves were alive. Harry pulled several books off the shelves, marveling at the ingeniousness of preservation charms, and then settled himself in a nearby chair, the rest of the chamber forgotten.

Hours later Harry sat in the same big puffy armchair he had settle in earlier. He had a large tome in his lap and Mort, as Harry had taken to calling him with permission of course, was wrapped in a giant coil beside the chair. He'd learned a lot about the snake at his side, including why he wasn't dead after looking him in the eyes. Mortedolv had a second lid on his eyes, which allowed him to see without killing or petrifying anyone. Handy that.

Harry had also learned much about Salazar Slytherin, and his opinion about him had changed dramatically. It had also confused him greatly about the Dark Lord's motives for being the way he was. It turned out that Salazar had no major qualms with Muggles and Muggleborns. He did have a few problems with the witch hunting's and the way the Muggles of the time feared Wizards, but he understood it as just that, fear, and that was why he pushed for the two to be separated. But he also believed that those Muggles and Muggleborns that could cope

with Wizards had every right to the Wizarding World as the Wizards did. So what made everyone think Salazar Slytherin was against Muggles and Muggleborns? And if the Dark Lord had been in the Chamber of Salazar before, why was he sprouting about ridding the world of anyone not of Pureblood under Slytherin's name? It didn't make sense.

"Mort?" asked Harry lowering the book with an intense frown on his face.

"Yes, Harry?" Mort yawned and looked up at him. Harry blinked. Snakes could yawn?

"I don't understand. If Salazar didn't dislike Muggles and Muggleborns, then why does the world think he did? Why do they think he was a Dark Wizard, when there were so many Dark Wizards that he was against at the time. He helped build this school, yet everyone is so against him. It doesn't make any sense," Harry rambled on in Parseltongue.

Mort simply blinked at him. "I do not know. I did not understand the boy, Tom, either, which is why he never saw these chambers."

Harry sat up quickly from his curled up position in the chair. "Tom Riddle never came into Salazar's Chambers?"

Mort nodded. "I did not like the feel of him. He was dark and had less of a soul than a normal man and he had the scent of someone who had killed before. So I hid the Chambers of Salazar from him."

"I've killed before," Harry said distractedly with a distant glare in his eyes. "I was forced to; every time." A tear slid down from the corner of his eye at the memory of what he had been forced to do. He felt flushed and faint as the memories assaulted him. "Ginny..." he would never forgive himself.

Mort uncurled slightly and nudged Harry with his giant head. "Yes, but not like him. He was not forced. He tried to control me. He threatened me with death. I made sure everyone he sent me to kill, did not die,

just sleep... until the last. I had not meant to kill her. I had meant to stop him, but she had gotten in the way.”

Harry didn't know why, maybe it was adolescent emotions taking over, or maybe it was just his extreme tiredness and growing fever, but he wrapped his arms around the snake's neck, seeking comfort from the giant serpent he had been forced to kill in the past.

Harry didn't know when he had fallen asleep, but when he woke up it was in a large, very comfortable, four-poster bed and he could feel that his fever had grown quite a bit and he was achy all over. Mort was curled up on the floor of the large bedroom and he lifted his head when Harry suddenly sat up and looked at his watch and swore a string of vulgarities in English and Parseltongue. He'd been gone far too long.

Harry put his head in his hand at a brief dizziness and then once recovered started muttering at the realization of the situation he could possibly be in. “They're going to kill me; all of them. Uncle Vernon, Aunt Petunia, Professor Dumbledore, Hermione, Ron, Mrs. Weasley... Hell I won't be surprised if Hagrid shows up as well,” Harry muttered switching unconsciously between Parseltongue and English in his panicking state.

“Who's going to kill you?” Mort sounded alarmed.

Harry suddenly laughed and shook his head the panic disappearing completely. “No one,” Harry sighed tiredly. “I've just been here too long. They're going to notice I'm gone, if they haven't already. I just hope Professor Dumbledore isn't having me watched...” Harry stopped. “Moody!” Harry declared in English as he jumped out of bed, his bare feet hit the glacial like floor and he jumped back on the bed with a rather girly yelp. “How'd you get my shoes off?”

Mort seemed to be laughing at him; at least Harry thought that was what the weird hissing sound was. “Very carefully,” he finally said and nudged Harry's shoes to him with his tail.

Harry reached to the floor and put on his shoes and socks, which he found still in the bed, back on his feet. He left the bedroom and

entered into the main sitting room, Mort following behind him. "I've got to go. I believe I was followed here and I'm not supposed to be at the school," Harry told Mort distractedly. "I'll be back again in a few weeks when school starts, I can't risk coming back sooner." He said hurriedly.

"Are you going to be all right, Harry?"

Harry stopped and looked back at the giant serpent; he smiled softly to his new friend and nodded. "Yes."

--

Harry, having discovered the stairs that had led back up to Moaning Myrtle's bathroom from the chamber, peered around cautiously before exiting into the corridor. Myrtle had followed him out and Harry turned back, with his Invisibility Cloak firmly in place.

"Myrtle, can I ask you not to tell anyone about me being here?" he asked quietly, looking up at the ghost who he discovered could see him through his cloak.

Myrtle tilted her head in thought for a moment and then sighed. "All right, I suppose, but you must promise to come back and visit me again," she said sweetly.

Harry nodded. "Of course I'll come back. Nice seeing you Myrtle, bye." Harry waved and started swiftly down the hall. He didn't see Dumbledore watching him from a concealed hallway nearby, and he didn't hear him following after him.

Harry made his way quickly to the other side of the school. He stopped just outside the Hospital Wing and put his ear to the door. He wasn't going to leave without the second thing he had come for, even if it meant taking longer getting back. Hearing nothing from within, Harry opened the door and slipped into the darkened ward. He slowly made his way to the other end of the hall where he knew Madam Pomfrey kept her Potion stores.

He opened the cabinet and shuffled a few bottles around before he found what he was looking for. Taking three Dreamless Sleep Potions from the shelves, Harry placed them into his bag and then he pulled out a Strengthening Potion of maximum strength. "This should do," he whispered to himself as he carefully looked at the label, and then placed it too in his bag. Harry closed the cabinet and turned around to leave but stopped and turned back and opened the cabinet again. He pulled out a vial of fever reducer and downed it, placing the empty vial into his pack. He walked straight past a frowning Dumbledore without seeing him and continued out of the school.

As he reached the edge of the darkened school property, he pulled his spare ageing potion from his bag and downed the contents. He concentrated and then Apparated with an audible crack. Dumbledore stood on the steps of Hogwarts watching his student go, completely bewildered and worried by his young Gryffindor's actions that day.

Harry appeared queasily in his backyard and looked around carefully, more carefully than before, as he suspected that his house was being watched. He pulled off his cloak and started into the house, stuffing the cloak into his bag as he went. There was a loud screech and a crash that sounded like dishes hitting the floor. Harry ran into the kitchen and immediately stopped himself from pulling his wand out.

"Get that ruddy bird out of my house, boy!" Vernon was a dangerous shade of red and Harry scrambled towards the owl.

"Yes, Uncle Vernon." Harry grabbed at the tawny owl and grabbed the letter in its claws. He made to stuff the letter into his book bag as the owl flew away out the window, but his uncle grabbed it from him.

"What's this?" Uncle Vernon ripped the envelope open.

"It's for me, not you!" Harry complained and tried to take the letter back. Harry's stomach dropped as he watched a malevolent smirk develop on his uncle's face as he scanned the letter.

Suddenly the letter was thrust into Harry's hands. "Read it!" Uncle Vernon hissed; a delighted glint in his eyes. Harry opened the letter,

“Out loud!” Dudley and Aunt Petunia both looked at Harry as he stared back at his Uncle and then looked down and read the letter.

“Umm, Dear Mr. Potter, We have just received intelligence that unauthorized Apparation was used at your residence at twenty-five minutes passed eight...” Harry’s eyes widened and he glanced at his uncle before he continued. “As you know, underage wizards are not permitted to perform spells outside school, and further spell work on your part may lead to expulsion from said school. Furthermore; Apparation without an authorized license is illegal, if you continue, serious charges may be brought against you –” Vernon grabbed the letter back from Harry.

“You didn’t tell us you weren’t allowed to use magic outside school!” Harry took a step back away from his uncle as a maddening glint formed in the beefy man’s eyes. Oh, Harry was no stranger to what was about to happen to him. “Forgot to mention it... Slipped your mind, I daresay!” Harry was now backed into a corner, his uncle looming over him. “Well, I’ve got news for you, boy...” Harry flinched. “I’m locking you up. You’re never going back to that freaky school!” Vernon grabbed Harry roughly around the back of the neck, and the mark there burned making Harry nearly yell out as he hissed in pain, not that his enraged uncle took notice as he dragged Harry up the stairs. “And you can’t magic yourself out or they’ll expel you,” he laughed as he tossed Harry none too gently into his room and slammed the door shut.

Harry struggled to his knees, gasping from the pain that still shot down his spine from the mark. It subsided after a few minutes and he staggered to his feet and over to Hedwig’s cage. “Hey girl, I want you to go to the Weasleys, they’ll take care of you. I’ll be along in a couple of weeks; I just have to wait for someone,” he said shakily. Hedwig blinked in concern for her master and nipped at his fingers gently. Harry opened the window and let Hedwig out into the night. He only had to wait till his birthday and Dobby. Hedwig had been lucky that Harry had managed to keep his uncle from locking her up so far, but he was concerned that now he wouldn’t be able to stop him, not without the threat of magic.



Harry lay down on his bed after his owl had gone from sight. He was still breathing hard from the pain from his scar. It was times like these that Harry wondered why he was even bothering to stick around. An all too familiar urge suddenly hit Harry and he closed his eyes against it. It was bad enough that he had the twin blood scars; he certainly didn't need any more. That wasn't to say that the urge to cut himself was going away.

He hadn't ever meant to start. Shortly after Dumbledore's death, he was sitting in his room in Twelve Grimmauld Place, and had been cleaning out his trunk when he had cut himself accidentally with the knife from his potion's kit, which had been dumped into his trunk. He didn't know why or how, but ten bloody, but shallow slashes later, and he felt as if a weight had been lifted off his shoulders. He'd stopped after the blood ritual, probably because at that point, he didn't have the time and then he had the torture sessions from the Dark Lord to worry about. He'd never thought he'd get the urge again after that.

Harry wrapped both his hands tightly in his blanket and forced himself to go to sleep. He'd take the Dreamless Sleep Potion only if he dreamed. He really hoped he didn't, he needed real sleep, and he didn't know if he'd be able to stop the urge again if he was awoken from a memory again.

--

A/N: Hope you all like it so far.

## Chapter Four – Professor Severus Snape

Harry was lying on his stomach with his hands under his chin, as he listened to the muffled conversations coming from downstairs. The Masons were over, which also meant that today was his twelfth birthday and he would shortly be visited by an over exuberant, big-eyed, floppy-eared, – liked to try and save his life by getting him killed in the process – House Elf. “Joy of joys,” Harry mumbled to himself.

The last couple weeks had been hell on earth for him. The only time he was let out of his barred-windowed room was to do back breaking chores until he was ready to drop and to use the bathroom. Not to mention, he’d been pushed around a few times and his Uncle had jarred his mark more than once, resulting in a searing pain running down his spine that nearly brought him to his knees. Though he supposed he was lucky that he was let out to do chores, as last time he wasn’t even allowed to do that. Of course, the last time he was only locked up for three days.

A small pop was the only thing that alerted Harry to Dobby’s arrival. Harry didn’t react; he simply glanced over at the elf in boredom. “What?” he asked quietly. The elf squeaked in surprise at being noticed so quickly.

“Harry Potter! So long has Dobby wanted to meet you, Sir...” Harry cut the elf off before his high-pitched voice could alert his uncle.

“Shush!” Harry hushed getting up from his bed. “I don’t want to get in anymore trouble, thank you very much. So just stay there and be quiet, I have a proposition for you.” Dobby’s floppy ears perked up. Harry smiled slightly, now that he had the over eager elf’s attention...

Harry proceeded over the next few minutes to explain his plan, to not only obtain Riddle’s diary, but also to free the elf from his position as Malfoy’s slave. Harry finished by telling Dobby that if he didn’t wish to be without a family to serve, he could work for him, for pay even. Harry was grateful that the elf didn’t question him on his knowing of the diary and the danger at Hogwarts.

Dobby looked to be in serious thought for a moment and then he nodded. "Dobby can do this, Sir," he said quietly and Harry was relieved that he hadn't started jumping up and down or something.

Harry smiled and patted the elf on the shoulder. "Good, now leave before my Uncle realizes you're here. Oh and Dobby, can I have my letters back please?" The elf gave a sheepish smile and handed Harry the bundle of Muggle post letters. Harry didn't dare thank Dobby, for the risk of setting the elf off would bring, instead he just nodded. "All right, go now, quietly."

Dobby nodded again and then disappeared with a small pop, which was barely heard by even Harry. Harry breathed a sigh of relief at hearing the continued and uninterrupted conversations going on down stairs, glad that his family hadn't heard himself and Dobby talking this time around.

Harry opened his already packed trunk and pulled out a properly made Ageing Potion. It had helped that he had actually gotten a couple nights of real sleep thanks to the Dreamless Sleep Potions he had pilfered from Hogwarts, not to mention he was well again thanks to the fever reducer. He'd have to remember to replace them at some point.

Harry gulped down the potion and pulled out his wand. He pointed it at the bars and muttered a spell. The bars silently melted away. Harry pointed his wand at his trunk and Hedwig's cage, separately, and shrunk them down to pocket size and then he pocketed them both and picked up his invisibility cloak and his broom that he had left out. He looked around his room briefly to make sure he hadn't left anything, and then swinging his cloak around him, he jumped out the window on his broom.

The note he'd left for his family fluttered lightly in the breeze. Harry hadn't really cared about worrying them, especially since the likely hood of them ever worrying about him was very slim, but he wanted to make sure that they knew that he was coming back at the end of the school term. After all, he really didn't have anywhere else to go, and as much as he loathed his relatives, they had taken care of him

for most of his life and he owed it to them to keep the protection wards around the house from collapsing with his absence.

Harry flew as far as the nearby park and then landed softly. He unshrunk his trunk and placed his broom and invisibility cloak inside and then after re-shrinking his trunk and placing it back into the pocket of his sweatshirt, he pulled out his wand and stepped up to the curb. He held up his wand and then quickly stepped back as the Knight Bus sped towards him and then stopped abruptly. Harry pulled the hood of his sweatshirt up over his head before Stan could appear.

"Welcome to the Knight Bus, emergency transport for the stranded..."

"I know, Stan" Harry interrupted.

"How is it ye know me name, have we met before?" Stan questioned, looking Harry up and down suspiciously.

"Yeah, we've met, though it was a few years ago," Harry said with a small smirk as he held back a laugh.

Stan stared blankly back at him for a moment before he shrugged. "Sure, whatever ye say kid, where you goin' anyway?"

Harry thought about it for a moment. Appearing at the Burrow right away might raise some suspicions, especially as he'd never technically been there before. "The Leaky Cauldron," Harry finally answered.

"Right, take a seat. We got two others goin' there as well." Harry nodded and after paying, went to the nearest empty bed and sat down just as the bus banged into movement.

It wasn't long before they arrived in front of the Leaky Cauldron with a sudden stop that had Harry hanging on to the nearest pole so he wouldn't go flying. Harry got off the bus with the other passengers. That was when he noticed one of the passengers getting off with him. It was Nymphadora Tonks. Harry smiled at her, but didn't talk to her or make any motion of recognition. He followed her into the pub but no farther as she moved into the Alley and Harry stopped at the bar.

"I would like a room for the night and if you have an owl, I'd like to send a letter to the Weasley family," Harry said to Tom the bartender. Tom recognized him and Harry stopped himself from rolling his eyes as the man's eyes flicked up to look at his hidden scar.

"Mr. Potter, o' course," Tom said after a moment before handing Harry a key from the wall behind him. "Room number seven and I'll let ye know when Renoir get's back and ye can use him to send off ye letter."

"Thanks." Harry took the key and headed up the stairs to where he remembered room seven to be.

Once in the small room, Harry un-shrunk his belongings and pulled out his Hogwarts' cloak. It was a simple black cloak with the Hogwarts' crest on the left side. He threw it over his shoulders and after locking up his room made his way downstairs, back into the pub.

Harry walked to the back and after tapping his wand over the correct bricks that opened the wall into Diagon Alley, he made his way towards Gringotts. The sun was just setting as he made his way inside. He had some serious shopping to do if he was going to get his younger body back up to speed, both magically and physically, with his past – umm – future self.

It didn't take long for Harry to access his vault and start at his shopping. He went first to Flourish and Blott's, keeping his hood up on his cloak. Some of the things he got at the bookstore would sound alarms – even in Ron's adolescent mind – had he gotten them with the rest of his school supplies, which he decided to get when he went with the Weasleys'. It obviously wouldn't be good to have everyone thinking that he supported the Dark Arts, even though Harry had learned that there was no line between what people considered light and dark magic. Dark magic, if used cautiously was classified as grey if you wanted to get technical with it. It all really depended on how one used it. Even light magic, such as the Patronus Charm could be seen as a dark spell if used in certain ways. After all, given enough power, it could kill a Dementor, something that wasn't known yet.

After the bookstore and stationary shop, skipping over Quality Quidditch Supplies, Harry made his way to Ollivander's Wands. The shop was dimly lit as he entered. "Mister Ollivander?" Harry called into the silent shop.

"Mr. Potter, Holly and Phoenix Feather, what can I help you with?" Ollivander said as he seemed to appear out of nowhere.

"I seem to be having a problem with my wand," Harry said as he set his wand on the counter. "My spells are weaker than they normally are and I don't feel as connected as I used to."

"Has someone taken your wand from you?" Ollivander asked.

Harry frowned. Yes, in the past – future, the Dark Lord had taken his wand, but only after Harry had dropped it, but he couldn't say that, and would it really affect him now? Harry shook his head. "No."

"You are certain?" Harry nodded. "Then I do not know, give it a wave for me," he said surveying Harry curiously.

Harry picked up the wand lightly and used the levitation spell on a nearby box. The box levitated and then sat back down at Harry's direction. Harry immediately put the wand back on the counter, happy enough to touch it as little as possible.

Ollivander raised an eyebrow. "You dislike your wand. I would dare say you are disgusted with it. Why?"

"I-I don't know," Harry lied as he looked at his feet.

"Yes you do. Until you can accept that whatever happened was not the wands fault, that it was only a tool, then the wand will never work for you properly. The wand chooses the wizard, Mr. Potter, remember that and you can accomplish great things." With that said, Ollivander disappeared back into his store.

Harry stared at his wand on the counter for quite a while afterwards. Ollivander was right, it wasn't the wand that had killed Ginny Weasley; it was him and he would have done the same given any

other wand, because he was too weak to fight back. Harry felt tears come to his eyes and he wiped them away before he picked back up his wand and felt the familiar warmth and power.

In the shadows, Ollivander smirked as he watched the boy pick up his wand and leave. The wand chooses the wizard, and Harry Potter would do great things, again.

The apothecary was Harry's second to last stop for the night. It must have seemed awfully strange for a twelve-year-old boy, at night with his hood up, to be rummaging around in some of the more advanced potion ingredients, but he saw no other way. There was only one book on the subject and it was a potions book. The shop owner kept sending him glances as he helped other customers, but hadn't yet approached him.

Harry placed the last ingredient, which he would need for this particular stage of his plans, in the large basket he was holding his supplies in and turned back to the counter to pay. He glanced over the contents of the basket while he walked, making sure he'd gotten everything. He didn't get more than five steps before he ran straight into a dark, imposing, rather unforgiving body and he dropped his basket and some of his ingredients spilled out.

"I apologize, I didn't see you there," Harry said politely and rushed to retrieve his ingredients. As he did his hood fell from his head, and his eyes widened as a very familiar pale hand reached out from a black robe and picked up one of the fallen items. Harry slowly looked up to the figure and froze. "Professor," Harry finally managed to force out.

"Potter," Snape said neutrally as he looked intently at what else Harry carried in his basket, as well as the other purchases he had made. His eyes scanned over the items for a moment and then he locked eyes with Harry. Harry flinched back at the sudden anger that radiated in Snape's onyx eyes. "What are you trying to do, kill yourself?" Snape seethed. Harry averted his professor's piercing gaze and quickly finished grabbing the ingredients from the floor and stood up. Snape followed, his eyes never leaving Harry. "These ingredients," Snape snarled as he tossed the bag of aconite back into

Harry's basket. "Do you have any idea how dangerous most of this can be?"

Harry stared back at the man, but then quickly averted his eyes again. Harry finally decided that he would not, at that moment win against a Legilimency assault, at least not from one of the most powerful Legilimens in the country, no matter how much he had practiced. "Yes, I do," he answered honestly. "They can be even more dangerous when mixed together. Now if you will excuse me, Professor, I still have a silver cauldron I need to purchase." Snape grabbed Harry's upper arm in a vice grip before he could leave to the counter. "Let go of me, Snape," Harry snarled quietly.

Snape actually flinched slightly, but didn't release him. "No, I may terribly dislike you, but I cannot allow you to purchase these items. You could kill yourself!"

Harry glared up at Snape with a hateful fire in his eyes, making them seem to be tinted almost red, and then smirked. "Perhaps," Harry said coolly. Snape let go and looked back at Harry as if he'd gone crazy. "But I've a counter measure, just in case. Won't be pleasant though," Harry answered truthfully with only the slightest shiver.

Snape grabbed the front of Harry's cloak and Harry rolled his eyes. He was really getting sick of this. "You are trying to unblock your magic before you are seventeen! Have you gone mad, do you know what that potion could do to your mind? I do not know how you found out how to do this, but for a second year potions student it is suicide! Even if you survive, which knowing your incompetence in the subject you won't; you could lose your mind completely!" Snape whispered harshly.

Of course, Harry was well aware of this, but he was also willing to take the risk. He was rather surprised that Snape had caught on to the potion he was going to make for himself so quickly. The variety of ingredients could make just about anything. And it wasn't a well know potion.

Harry grabbed onto Snape's hand and twisted it, forcing pain to run up the man's arm and making Snape let go. "I SAID, let go," Harry



whispered the last two words and pushed the man away from him. To say that Snape was surprised was an understatement, and his shock showed on his pale face. Harry started for the counter again, not letting the man who had killed Dumbledore delay him a third time.

Snape narrowed his eyes and furrowed his brow as he clutched at his sore wrist. He silently followed Harry up to the counter, but didn't stop him from buying any of the items. With his purchases paid for and bagged by the rather perplexed shop owner, Harry left the apothecary, well aware that Snape had followed him out.

"Albus would not tell us what happened to you down in the chamber," Snape said calmly. "I don't think he has ever kept anything from me before," Snape said quietly. Harry stopped and turned back to the man before he reached the nearby cauldron shop. "You saw him down there didn't you? You spoke to him?"

Harry looked away from Snape as he suddenly and vividly remembered the last time he had spoken to the Dark Lord in not just dying words, and a tear rolled down his cheek. He quickly wiped it away. "Yes," Harry answered shortly and started to walk away. "We are not at Hogwarts right now, Professor; you have no authority over me. So either run off to Dumbledore and tell him what you've found his Gryffindor Golden Boy doing, or leave me alone."

"Why are you doing this? What is the point? Even if you survive —"

Harry spun back around. He had no idea why he was even still talking to the man! "I know exactly what I'm doing and if it works I'll never have to worry about Vol—" Harry growled as pain cursed from his hidden scar. "The Dark Lord, if — when he returns," Harry spat and turned to leave again. And perhaps I'll be able to get rid of this damn scar, Harry thought as he entered into the cauldron shop.

Snape hadn't followed him in but stayed outside with a peculiar expression on his face. Harry ignored the other patrons as he went up to the counter. The shopkeeper looked at him as if he were no more than a nuisance. Harry hated it when people treated him like this as they'd done so most of his life, that was until they saw his scar. He scowled back at the man irritably, which was rather completely

lost on his twelve-year-old face. "I need a silver cauldron," Harry slipped out the piece of paper he had jotted down the needed ingredients on, and glanced over it, "number four standard."

The shopkeeper smirk at him. "I'm sorry, but by ministry law, you are too young to buy a silver cauldron, and I highly doubt you have enough galleons for one." There were only three other people in the shop, but they all looked over when Harry growled lightly in annoyance.

Harry resisted the childish urge to stomp his foot and ran a hand through his hair, making a show of revealing his scar. He hated using his fame, but sometimes, like it or not, it worked to get him what he wanted – or not. The shopkeeper raised an eyebrow, but otherwise didn't react. The other patrons started to whisper behind him though.

"Is there anything else I can get you, Mister Potter," he said with no pleasantness at all.

"No, no, I'll just take my business elsewhere," Harry growled out. "And make sure my friends do as well," he mumbled as he made his way passed a smirking Snape waiting outside.

Harry really didn't want to go into Knockturn Alley at night, but he wanted to make the potion to unlock his magic that night as it was the new moon and the potion would be at its peak effectiveness. He also wanted to make it before he sent an owl to the Weasleys, just in case they wanted him to come to the Burrow in the morning. He didn't know what the full side effects of the potion would be yet, and if it knocked him out for a day or two, it wouldn't raise too many questions as everyone, except Snape, thought he was still at the Dursleys.

Speaking of the slimy git of a Potion's master, Harry spun around about halfway to Knockturn Alley as Snape was still following him. "What do you want?" he demanded.

"Temper, Mister Potter. A little upset are you that your fame could not get you what you wanted?" Snape sneered.

"I believe it was you, Sir, who told me in my first potions class that 'fame clearly isn't everything,' or something along the lines of that," Harry sneered back with his best impression of Snape. "You were practically telling me not to use my fame, so of course, what else is an adolescent to do, but show a little rebellion." Harry wanted to laugh at the scowl that graced Snape's face, but held it back. "Now I ask again, what do you want? I don't have time for this; I still need to find a silver cauldron."

Snape looked behind Harry. "In Knockturn Alley, at night, clearly you are more deluded than I thought."

Harry shrugged; he'd had enough of this. He may appear twelve, but he was not a child and he was not going to fall for Snape's insults as he once had. "Yes, Professor, that is exactly where I am going, so you can either, as I said before leave me alone, or you can stop me," Harry turned to leave. "Which I'd really love to see you try," he muttered under his breath as he started to walk away.

"Or I can go back into the cauldron shop, ask Mister Weiss for a silver cauldron Number Four Standard, and help you make the potion so you don't blow yourself up. Out of the goodness of my heart, of course," Snape smirked as Harry turned back around.

"Goodness of your heart," Harry scoffed, as he narrowed his eyes at the potions master, though he was seriously considering the man's help. He wasn't a fool after all. He knew that he wasn't the best at potions and this was a highly advanced one, he'd had Hermione to help him make it the last time. "When it is concerning me, there is no goodness in your heart," Harry said coldly, more to himself. Snape scowled at that, but Harry wasn't finished. "However," Harry muttered and then cleared his throat. "I could use your help, but I want to know what you think you're going to get out of this."

There was a brief moment of shock on Snape's part. Whether it was because Harry had said he needed his help or because he knew Snape had an ulterior motive, Harry wasn't sure. "I will tell you after we get your cauldron and we are in a less public arena," Snape said quietly as he glanced around. There were a number of people

watching and Harry caught his meaning clearly, as he was certain there were one or two future, or former, Death Eaters among them. In fact, he was pretty sure he helped capture them in the past – or future.

Harry nodded slowly. “Very well,” he said and started back towards the cauldron shop with Snape on his heels. He just knew he was going to regret this in the future.

Harry handed Snape a pouch of galleons and waited outside the shop while Snape retrieved the cauldron he needed. He turned to see Snape and the shopkeeper, Mister Weiss, in the doorway. Snape was acting almost friendly with the man.

“I am so sorry, Severus, had I known the boy was picking the cauldron up for you I would not have turned him away. I thought he was just using his fame to harass the shop owners.”

“Yes, well I had told Potter to tell you that he was picking the cauldron up for me, but it must have slipped the boy’s mind. You would think that after a year with him that his incompetence would not surprise me. His skill in potions is even worse than his memory,” Snape sneered. Harry crossed his arms over his chest and rolled his eyes; he wasn’t that bad.

“I have to admit, that I am surprised by that, after all both James and Lily Potter were quite adept at potions and wasn’t Lily on her way to a mastery before she was killed?” Mister Weiss commented.

“Yes, she was,” Snape said quietly a frown marring his features.

Harry tried not to react to that news, he hadn’t known that. Well he hadn’t known his father was good at potions, though he hadn’t really given it a lot of thought since he had found out that the potions book from sixth year was Snape’s and had pretty much given up on potions. He never did find that book again. No one had ever really said anything to him about his parent’s abilities in school. He knew that James was good at Transfiguration and Lily good at Charms. It was strange that now he was just starting to feel rather inadequate compared to his parents. Perhaps this time he would do better in school. Put in more of an effort, learn new things.

So deep in thought, Harry didn't realize that Snape was finished until he was grabbed at the back of his neck and propelled towards the Leaky Cauldron. Harry let out a strangled yelp of pain and dropped to one knee.

"What's wrong, Potter?" Snape actually sounded worried as he put a hand on Harry's shoulder.

Harry breathed in deeply and shook off the pain as best he could. Blinking away the tears that came to his eyes, he shrugged off Snape's hand and stood shakily. "It's nothing, an old injury," he forced out and continued on to the Leaky Cauldron as if nothing had happened. Snape followed behind him with doubt and curiosity in his eyes.

--

It wasn't long before Harry fully realized how much of a mistake it was to have Professor Severus Snape help him with his potion. Harry sat staring at Snape in disbelief in his room at the Leaky Cauldron. Never in two life times would he have guessed that Severus Snape had most of his magic blocked. He had enough magic to get by, but apparently only at a level on par with a sixteen-year-old. And it was the real reason the man taught Potions instead of Defense. Obviously, he had Dumbledore – or the Dark Lord – unblock his magic just prior to Harry's sixth year in the last timeline. Of course, Harry knew how much of a mistake that was. It had resulted in Dumbledore's death.

Harry stared back at Snape unblinkingly for quite a while as Snape finished explaining. "If I help you make this potion, when you have your full magic will you unblock mine?" Snape asked evenly, though he was tensely staring back at Harry. Harry ran a hand through his hair and stood and paced the room. If he did this, it could be a huge mistake. "As I already told you, only someone with the magic of an adult can unblock my magic."

Harry stopped pacing and turned back to look at Snape. "Professor Dumbledore put this block on you?" Harry asked quietly.

"As I've already told you, yes," Snape said with a bit of bitterness in his voice.

"So it would take more than just an average bloke to unblock it," Harry commented to himself as he continued pacing, Snape watching him. So Snape somehow knew that in adulthood he would be on a similar level magic wise to Dumbledore. Of course, he knew. Harry scoffed to himself; he was the person who ran to the Dark Lord with half the damn Prophecy! Harry stopped again. "Will I get in trouble if I help you? Professor Dumbledore must have had a good reason to put the block on you," Harry said rather stonily. He could care less about getting in trouble; he was fishing for more information.

"No, I will dumb down my magic and I will not tell anyone about you lifting the block on yours," Snape replied. "As for Professor Dumbledore blocking my magic, yes, at the time he had a very good reason, but I have changed since then."

Harry glared at Snape, had he really? Then why had he killed Dumbledore? "Why? Why did he block your magic?" he asked. Of course, Harry already knew the answer to this.

"Potter, you really do not want to know." Harry continued to glare at Snape until finally, Snape let out an irritated huff of breath and looked away, and then he pulled back the sleeve on his left arm. "Because of this, Potter!" he snarled angrily and turned his arm over revealing the faded, yet still visible, Dark Mark.

Harry flinched slightly at the sight of it, but didn't look away. He stared at it for a good five minutes before he lifted his head to meet his Professor's eyes. "All right," Harry whispered. The shocked expression on Snape's face was priceless and Harry would have laughed had the moment not been so serious. "But I want you to swear a wizards oath on your magic that you will not go back to the Dark Lord, no matter what," Harry said very seriously. So they'd be losing a spy in the Dark Lord's ranks, Harry didn't care they didn't need one, they had Harry's foreknowledge.

Snape looked back at Harry, though he clearly wasn't seeing him as he was apparently waging a war within himself. Harry was

determined that Snape not make the same mistakes as he had in Harry's past. If there were a third person there with them, Harry would have forced the man to make an Unbreakable Vow with him. Finally, Snape nodded his head in agreement.

"All right, let's get started; we have all night, and tonight is the best night to make this potion," Harry said and started setting out the ingredients in precise order that they were to be added. He hadn't even cracked the book with the instructions open yet, this one he had spent hours studying with Hermione before her death.

--

Harry and Snape both stood back as Harry tossed the last ingredient into the cauldron and then they shielded their faces just in case. As there were no immediate explosions, Harry slowly looked through his fingers and then lowered his hands with a sigh. It had worked. The potion was done.

Snape walked up to the potion and put out the fire underneath it. He then ladled the potion into a vial and set it aside. "I have to say, well done; so why haven't you shown such competency in my classroom?" Snape asked as he started to clean up. "Your skills even rival that of some of my fifth years."

Harry paused in his walk around the table they were using. He hadn't thought of what he was going to tell Snape about his advances in potions, he was still trying to decide if this was all a good idea. "Let's umm... let's just say I had an epiphany at the end of the school term and I probably would have done rather well on your potions exam had I not been concerned with other matters."

"Actually, your exams were remarkably well done, had I graded them fairly," Snape mumbled, not looking up at Harry.

"You —" started Harry as he shot his head up, "Really?"

"Don't let it go to your head, Potter," Snape smirked, almost smiled. "You can drink the potion now; don't forget to add the three drops of your blood."

Harry without a second thought drew a small knife from his trunk and sliced it lightly over the tip of his finger, and then leveled his hand over the vial of potion. He let no more or less than three drops fall in before removing his hand. The potion turned an icy blue and let off a small puff of red smoke. Before Snape had a chance to comment or stop him, Harry lifted the vial to his lips. "Cheers," he said, while at the same time he prayed to the gods or anyone watching over him that he did not die, again.

Harry gulped down the potion and the effects were almost immediate as he collapsed as an unbearable amount of pain washed through him. Harry gave himself credit, he didn't scream. He simply closed his eyes tightly and prayed for the pain to subside quickly as he bit the inside of his lip and held his arms around himself. What he didn't notice was the magic that flowed around him and forced Snape to ward the room as best he could and leave, closing the door behind him.

Harry didn't know how long it all lasted but finally the pain was gone and he was able to sit up shakily with enough time to be suddenly very sick. It took a while but eventually Harry was able to stop retching. There was suddenly a soft knock at his door and Harry not trusting himself to stand, said with a scratchy voice, "come in."

Snape opened the door and walked in, closing it behind him. He waved his wand and the mess Harry had made vanished. "Are you all right? I've been out there for four hours," he said quietly almost worriedly.

Four hours, Harry thought, Merlin. He never wanted to go through anything like that again; he hadn't wanted to go through that the first time either. It was stupid, but Harry had to admit, worth it. He could feel his magic again, all of it... well almost all of it. The magic of the Protectors still wasn't present, though he could feel a tingling of it, so he knew it was there, somewhere. Harry smirked to himself; it figured he'd probably have to visit the room again. Harry didn't really have any idea what to call it, all he knew was that one moment he was walking into a room he'd never seen before and the next moment he was on the floor, sizzling; most unpleasant.



"I'm fine," Harry finally answered. "That was not pleasant."

"No, it didn't look pleasant," Snape said as he helped Harry to his feet. "I have to say that it was incredibly stupid what we did, you could have been killed," Snape commented seriously, as he helped Harry to sit on his bed. "I am fairly certain the potion was not supposed to be that color."

Oh yes it was. "I agree, never let me do that again," Harry said forcing humor into his voice while at the same time he felt as if he were burning up. "Merlin, I'm hot," Harry said quietly and then tugged on his sweatshirt and subsequently his t-shirt underneath and pulled them off over his head. Something was wrong. He hadn't had this after effect the last time. He didn't see the shocked look Snape gave him, but he did hear the man's audible gasp.

Harry looked down at his torso and his blood ran cold at the sight that greeted him. It had become familiar in the week leading up to his death, but here, he'd never expected to see it. "Potter, what is that?" Snape demanded, his eyes not leaving Harry's torso, or more specifically the hourglass shaped burn mark in the middle of Harry chest.

"T-the Death Mark," Harry whispered as the room started spinning and then darkness over took him.

--

A/N: A little long winded, but will pick up.

## Chapter Five – Secrets Revealed

Harry twisted and turned in his fever-induced sleep. Nightmares assaulted his senses and he could do nothing against them as they were all memories; memories from the last couple of months before his death.

“Harry!”

Hermione screamed at Harry as he was thrown roughly to the ground and put yet again under the torture of the Cruciatus Curse that shot out of the Dark Lord’s wand. Harry screamed as pain assaulted him, but he fought pasted the pain to grab hold of Gryffindor’s sword in front of him. The curse was suddenly lifted from him and all of Harry’s thoughts were focused on getting back to his feet to finish his fight with Voldemort. He gasped for breath as he pushed himself back up and spun around to face the Dark Lord again.

“We finish this now, Voldemort!” Harry rasped out and swung the sword at Voldemort’s torso. The sword was ripped from his grasp before it ever had time to connect and Harry was forced to his knees as the back of his neck was grabbed roughly and he was turned around just in time to see the Killing Curse hit Ron in the back. “NO!” Harry screamed out, but there was nothing he could do for him.

The grip on the back of his neck tightened and he closed his eyes as he heard Voldemort’s voice right by his ear. “See what you have done, Harry. You have killed your best friend.”

“Go to hell, Voldemort! I didn’t kill him, you did!” Voldemort laughed at Harry and made him look up at the battle still taking place in front of them. He watched as Hermione was forced to her knees and her wand was ripped away from her. “No, Voldemort! Kill me instead, leave her alone!” Harry pleaded, silently praying that the Order would finally arrive and rescue her.

“No,” Voldemort whispered. “First you will learn to fear saying my name, boy, and then I will kill you.” Voldemort nodded and the Death Eater holding Hermione let go of her and aimed his wand at her heart.

Hermione looked straight at Harry with fear but acceptance in her eyes. 'Harry,' she mouthed before the green light of the Killing Curse struck her and she fell. Unimaginable anger and sorrow swelled within Harry and he didn't even register that he was under the Cruciatus Curse again until it was lifted. Harry simply lay on the ground; the fight completely gone from him as he gave up...

Harry sat up abruptly and put his head in his hands as sobs wracked his body. After the death of both of his friends, he had given up and for it spent two of the worst weeks of his life in a tiny cell somewhere in the depths of Riddle Manor. He could still hear the echoes of Voldemort's voice...

"Do you know what this is?" Voldemort pointed to a symbol in an ancient looking book as Harry hung limply from the chains holding him to the wall. "This, boy, is the Death Mark. It was once given to Wizards sentence to death before their souls were ripped out of them by the Dementors Kiss." Voldemort closed the book gently. "The ministry seems to think it too cruel to use now. They had all of the branding spheres destroyed." Lucius Malfoy walked in carrying a fire red sphere. "All but one..."

Harry remembered his voice going raw from screaming. The pain was unimaginable. It was no wonder the ministry had banned the use of it. What had been left of the Order of the Phoenix had rescued him the next morning, which had been two days before his seventeenth birthday. A day he'd never be able to erase from his mind, as it had been the day that he had been forced into murdering Ginny Weasley. He deserved the Death Mark!

Harry eventually got himself under control and that was when he first noticed the Potions Master sitting in a chair beside his bed, staring calculatingly at him. The staring match went on for a good five minutes before Snape finally broke the silence.

"Who are you?"

Harry swallowed hard at those words before he answered. "Harry Potter."

"No!" Snape snarled. "Harry Potter is a twelve year old boy who's never even heard of the Death Mark, let alone seen one before. Harry Potter is not yet a second year student who has no idea about where to find the potion's ingredients to make the potion he did last night, let alone even know where to look to find such a potion. And Harry Potter does not have the Dark Mark burned into his left arm. So I ask again, WHO ARE YOU?" Snape shouted and Harry flinched.

"Harry Potter," he said again quietly as he looked down at his bare left forearm, where indeed the Dark Mark was branded into his arm, distorted only slightly by the blood curse scar that ran through it. A tear slid down his cheek as he closed his eyes to the sight of it. Silence swept over the room for a good ten minutes before Harry finally looked up to his potions professor, a decision made up in his mind. "I'm from the future."

Snape stared back at Harry. "Go on," he said quietly, though he didn't look as if he was going to believe anything Harry was about to tell him. Harry wouldn't believe anything he was about to tell him.

"Five years from now, the summer after my sixth year, I went to Hogwarts looking for you and found out that I am a Protector. Two weeks and two days after that Hermione, Ron, and I went looking for what we thought was the Dark Lord's last Horcrux and instead were tricked and met him at Privet Drive, where Ron and Hermione were killed in front of me as were my remaining relatives. I was captured and tortured for two weeks. During which time I receive unwillingly both the Dark Mark and the Death Mark. I was rescued by the remaining members of the Order of the Phoenix and on my seventeenth birthday, I was forced to murder Ginny Weasley while under the Imperious Curse... Five days later, I finally killed the Dark Lord, but not before, obtaining a mortal wound.

"I woke up as a ghost in the chamber of the Philosopher's Stone above my own eleven year old body. When I reached out to touch him I touched the shattered remains of the stone and was sucked into my younger body and the next thing I knew I was waking up in the hospital wing with a second chance at life. But now I'm not so sure I'm going to get that," Harry finished and looked down at his white knuckled hands that clutched the blanket that covered his legs.

Snape was silent for a very long time as he stared at Harry unblinkingly. Harry hadn't noticed it before, but Snape had both of their wands clutched in his hands. Finally, Snape broke the silence. "I don't know why, but I believe you," Snape said quietly. "Is – is that why you wanted me to take the oath, because – because I rejoin the Dark Lord."

Harry quietly contemplated for a moment; he didn't know if he should tell the man anything about his own future, but Harry had already changed too much, he supposed it didn't really matter. Harry shook his head. "I don't know," Harry said honestly, looking at him. "You killed Professor Dumbledore in front of me when Draco Malfoy refused to and then you ran. I – I didn't ask questions when I caught up with you."

"You killed me?" Snape was rather pale as he asked that, whether it was from the knowledge that he was the one to kill Dumbledore, or because his future killer could be sitting in front of him, Harry wasn't certain. But something inside him knew that it was the first.

Harry shook his head. "No, I handed you over to the Ministry and they gave you the Dementor's kiss. You didn't get a trial. I asked for one, but at that point, they'd stopped trusting me. I did manage to get Draco a trial, though I was probably already dead by the time they got to it."

Snape nodded. "They stopped trusting you?" he asked after a few moments.

"Yes, a couple days before I captured you I found out I was Protector of Hogwarts and foolishly told the Order. We had a spy that ran to the Ministry, and naturally, the entirety of Wizarding Britain knew soon after, via the Prophet. I'm kind of glad I died before I got to see what people really thought of me because of yet another stupid title," Harry scoffed.

Snape let out a deep breath. "I take it that you have not told anyone about this."

"Who would believe me?" Harry half laughed and then shook his head with a sigh. "No. Professor Dumbledore and Madam Pomfrey saw a couple of my scars, but they seem to think that I'm cutting myself. The Death Mark and the Dark Mark are new. I had hoped they wouldn't follow me into the past as my other curse scars did. I guess I'm just going to have to be careful and keep them covered."

"Other curse scars?"

Harry nodded. "The one on the back of my neck," Harry pointed to the snake shaped burn mark at the base of his neck. "Another gift from the Dark Lord; it causes me pain when I hear, think about, or especially say, the Dark Lord's name. It also hurts like hell when someone touches it."

"Oh," Snape said as he flinched fractionally in remembrance of earlier. "I apologize for that."

"It's all right, you didn't know. Neither did Uncle Vernon unfortunately," Harry mumbled the last bit. "Anyways, the two on my arms are from Gryffindor and Slytherin's swords and they're only cursed because I did a blood ritual to make myself more powerful, not that it did a lot of good. They're what got Professor Dumbledore and Madam Pomfrey thinking I'm cutting myself, but I think I managed to convince Professor Dumbledore that it wouldn't happen again."

"Will it happen again?" Snape asked lowering his eyes to Harry's forearms briefly, the scars weren't as visible as they had been, but without his shirt on, they were more than noticeable. Harry didn't bother hiding them.

He looked the man in the eyes. "Most probably, yes," he answered truthfully. He hadn't been able to beat back the urge. Not with being locked up for so long at Privet Drive.

Snape nodded with something akin to understanding in his eyes. "So, where do you go from here? I assume you have a plan. If I were given the opportunity to go back and rewrite my past I would most certainly do many things differently," Snape said with a thoughtful gleam in his eyes.

"I've already started. A few more things to sort out and the only thing I'll have to worry about during the school year is school." Harry half-smiled at the thought of a normal school year, but was knocked out of his reflections by a rasp on his door. Harry quickly grabbed his sweatshirt and pulled it on and then rather wobbly got out of bed, glancing out the window as he did. It looked to be late morning. Snape stood as Harry cautiously opened the door. He sighed; it was only Tom the barkeep.

"Renoir is back, Mr. Potter, if ye still wanted to send off ye letter."

"Yes, of course, thank you. I'll be down in a moment," Harry said and then closed the door as Tom left. Snape glanced at Harry curiously. "I decided after escaping my relative's house, that showing up at the Weasleys' residence without ever having actually been there might raise some eyebrows. As my owl is currently with them..."

"Well, well, Potter, it seems that you have actually learned to use that Gryffindor brain of yours," Snape smirked.

Harry glared back at him. "I'll have you know Professor that the Sorting Hat wanted to put me in Slytherin." The look on Snape's face was priceless and Harry chuckled at the man.

"Harry Potter in Slytherin, now that is a scary thought," Snape said under his breath, but Harry heard him quite clearly.

"Hey, I resent that," Harry literally squeaked and then it was Snape's turn to laugh, though he tried rather hard to suppress it and then turned it into a cough when he failed. Harry smirked at his attempts as his face turned slightly pink with embarrassment. It was good to know that his sometimes... well, most of the time, snarky Potions professor had a sense of humor, especially after what he had just told him. "So how is it I go about unblocking your magic?" Harry asked after a few moments.

"We'll have to wait until after you are back at Hogwarts or the ministry will detect your use of underage magic –"

"Nope," Harry said as he sprang to his trunk, pulled out his last vial of aging potion, and held it up. "I've got that covered and I can make more now that I've been to Diagon Alley."

Snape raised a curious eyebrow. "What is that supposed to be?"

"An Aging Potion, special recipe. Lets me do magic outside of school without getting caught. I can Apparate too, though it's a little uncomfortable with the body of a twelve year old, I'm hoping that will change some now that I have full use of my magic."

"You made this?" Snape asked.

"Yes... and no. I made the potion, but the Weasley twins developed it in my fourth year to try and get passed an age line; didn't work for that, but the ministry detects things differently. Geniuses they are."

"Fred and George Weasley?" asked Snape looking aghast and Harry nodded with a smirk on his face. "Perhaps I should give them a little more credit. That is if they would stop their pranks on me."

Harry out right laughed at that. "They'd probably be insulted at being called smart. From what I gathered, the two of them purposely botched their O.W.L.s; three O.W.L.s a piece, that's all."

"I do believe I will never understand the likes of Fred and George Weasley," Snape mumbled.

"That makes two of us. So about this spell to unblock your magic; is it complicated?" Harry asked.

"Yes, but I am even more certain that you can do it now as I did when I thought you were only twelve," Snape said sincerely.

"Show me the spell."

--



Snape was correct, the spell was complicated, but not overly so. For a normal twelve-year-old though – unless you're Hermione Granger – Harry wasn't so sure he would have been able to manage it, even with his adult level of magic. The wand movements alone would have fumbled him up and it would have taken him hours to get it right. Especially as he remembered how much trouble he'd originally had with the simple levitation charm, and that was a simple swish and flick.

Harry was currently sitting and eating a late lunch while Snape was passed out cold on his bed. The reaction that Snape had to the unblocking of his magic was completely different from Harry's experience and Harry had to grumble that Snape had it easy. He wasn't even in pain for more than a few minutes before he passed out. Harry had to deal with almost four hours. Though, Harry had been forced to stand hours of torture without being allowed to pass out. The first thing Harry was going to do when Lestrage escaped Azkaban, was hunt her down and give her a taste of her own torture. Merlin, he hated that woman.

Harry looked over at Snape. He had been conked out for a good three hours and Harry had sent off his letter to the Weasleys as well as read most of one of the books he'd picked up at Flourish and Blott's. Harry was just setting aside the remains of his lunch when Snape suddenly sat up.

"That was – interesting," Snape mumbled.

"You had it easy," Harry said grumpily. "So did I lift the block completely?"

Snape smiled, actually smiled, not smirk. "Yes, it's definitely gone."

"That's good," Harry whispered and then looked up at the sound of tapping on the window. It was Hedwig. Harry jumped up and let his bird fly in and land on his arm. "Hey girl, I missed you. Sorry I had to leave you with the Weasleys but Uncle Vernon locked me up, I wasn't about to let him do the same to you." Hedwig nuzzled her head against his hand and then held out her leg with the letter tied to it.

Harry took the letter and skimmed over it. He almost laughed at the 'What the Bloody Hell Are You Doing in Diagon Alley?' written across the top in Ron's messy scrawl and he could just imagine Molly Weasley's 'Ronald, language,' that would accompany it. The rest of the letter said that they'd be there later that afternoon to collect him and bring him back to the Burrow.

"When you said escaping your relative's, you literally meant escaping?" questioned Snape rather suddenly.

Harry looked up and nodded. "A couple weeks ago I took a little jaunt to Hogwarts to obtain some Dreamless Sleep Potion and take care of what would have been a large problem. Anyways I was rather dead on my feet, I hadn't been sleeping much at all; I still don't. I managed to botch the Aging Potion. It worked to get me there, but not to get me back. I arrived just as a ministry owl did, scaring the wits out of my relatives. I hadn't told them that I couldn't do magic outside of school and had been keeping them in line with the threat. Needless to say, my Uncle was furious and locked me up. At least this time I was able to get Hedwig out and keep my stuff. Though last time I was only locked up for three days before the Weasley's rescued me."

"I had no idea your home life was like that. Why haven't you told Albus about this? He was the one who put you there after all; he could take you out as easily." Snape actually looked rather appalled. Harry had almost expected the man to blame him for his Uncle's actions.

Harry shrugged; it didn't really matter to him anymore. "He knows. My Hogwarts letters were address to the cupboard under the stairs, and when Hagrid came to collect me; my Uncle had moved the family to the most remote location to get away from the owls. It was rather hilarious actually," Harry said with a slight chuckle, before he sobered. "My relatives hate anything magic, so in proxy they hate me. I'll never get them to see me for who I am and not my magic, but I owe them for taking care of me. I won't abandon them and let the wards fall around their house. They already died for protecting me once; I won't have it happen again."

Snape nodded but he seemed to be fighting to understand as he sat down at the table and pulled forward the lunch that Harry had brought up for him. "Tell me about your past – future – whatever. You must get really confused."

Harry chuckled at that comment and then obliged Snape his curiosities as he told the man about his past, starting with his second year with Riddle, the Diary, and the Basilisk, which he then revealed was named Mortdo. His professor had a good laugh at that, but was a little unnerved to find out that Harry was a Parselmouth, and there was a fully-grown Basilisk currently living under the school.

Harry continued after that to tell him about Sirius and his escape from Azkaban. Snape was shocked to find out that Sirius had been wrongly accused, and that Pettigrew was still alive. Harry had said that as soon as he could he was going to get his Godfather out of the prison. Snape actually offered to help, which surprised Harry greatly.

It took Harry a great deal of time and emotional energy to dwell into his fourth, fifth and sixth years at the school. He always found a way not to think about the last few years before, so it was difficult for him to talk about them now. But it also felt good to open up to someone again. Ron and Hermione had always been his sounding board and still he had never told them everything. He knew that they would not have been able to cope if he had told them everything; he was barely able to cope. Talking to Snape was refreshing as he didn't hold any judgments about what Harry had done or attempted to do in his past and he was actually a rather good listener.

The sun was just starting to set low in the sky when there was a knock at his door, snapping him out of the somber mood that had settled over him. Harry got up from his seat and opened the door and then his eyes widened and he quickly closed it again. "It's Ron, how am I supposed to explain your presence?"

Snape shrugged. "I am tutoring you in potions?"

"That's all you can come up with?" Another knock resounded from the door.

“Harry? Open the door, Mate,” Ron yelled through the door.

“They’re Weasley’s, they’ll believe just about anything,” Snape sneered.

Harry rolled his eyes. “You can’t Apparate out of here or something?”

Snape waved his hand nonchalantly. “Anti-Apparation wards.”

Harry nodded. “Right,” he said. He turned and opened the door just as Ron was about to pound on the door and ended up falling forward instead.

“Hi, Harry,” Ron smiled from the floor as he pushed himself up.

“Can’t even knock on a door properly, Weasley?” Snape drawled from his seat.

Ron jumped up and paled dramatically. “Professor Snape!” he gasped. “Please tell me I’m hallucinating,” he pleaded to Harry.

“Sorry, Mate, Professor Snape is tutoring me in Potions. Seems to think I’d be worth the effort after I did rather well on my Potions exam,” Harry explained, glancing at Snape.

Snape rolled his eyes. “I knew that comment was going to go to your head,” he grumbled as he stood up. “Well we were just finishing up anyways. As your adoring fans have come to rescue you, our session is over. I will see you at Hogwarts, Mr. Potter; Weasley.” Snape’s sneer was so prominent Harry almost laughed, especially after getting to somewhat know the man over the last few hours. “What we discussed, Potter, will stay between us.”

Harry nodded and then watched as Snape left. Harry really hoped he did the right thing in telling Snape about the future, and unblocking Snape’s magic. Harry focused back into the present as Ron started ranting.

“Tutoring you in potions, torturing you is more likely. How did you come about him tutoring you anyways? And what did he mean about the stuff you talked about?” Ron questioned rapidly.

“I ran into him in the Alley, he noticed I was carrying a potions book and offered to tutor me. And you know, he has to keep up his reputation, wouldn’t want anyone to know that he’s not as bad as he seems. Not that he’s not still greasy and a git,” Harry added by the appalled look coming onto Ron’s face. “He’s just a better teacher then I thought.”

“Right, Mate, I don’t envy you in the least. Mum’s downstairs, says for me to help you with your stuff, so we should probably hurry before she yells for us. It’s scary when mum yells,” Ron gulped.

--

A/N: Here you go another chapter.

## Chapter Six – The Burrow, Knockturn Alley, and Gringotts

Harry listened half-heartedly as Mrs. Weasley explained how to use the Floo Network. He of course already knew how, but as he wasn't supposed to know, he pretended that he didn't. When she finally handed him the Floo powder Harry threw it into the fireplace and disappeared. As always, he stumbled out into the Burrow and didn't have to mask his awe at the Weasley's house. He had always been fascinated with all the little things that made it a real home, something he'd never had.

As Harry brushed himself off, he noticed Ginny standing in the shadow of the doorway staring at him. He gave her a small smile before he was suddenly pounced on by Fred and George.

"Harry, you should have stayed at the Dursleys another day," George said throwing his arm around Harry's shoulders.

"Yeah, we had plans to borrow the car and rescue you," Fred added.

"Don't tell Mum though," George whispered as the fire flared to life again.

"She'd skin us alive if she thought..." Fred scooted closer to Harry.

"We wanted to take ..." George continued for Fred.

"The car," the twins said in unison, both looking around conspiratorially.

Harry nodded, and decided to humor the two. "The car?" he asked quietly, with a bit of intrigue laced in his voice.

"The car," said Fred.

"Yeah, Dad's been tinkering with it all summer," George muttered, eyeing Mrs. Weasley who had just come through the Floo after Ron.

"Dad says it can fly," Fred whispered.

"Told us he'd take us for a ride before school starts," George said even more quietly when Mrs. Weasley eyed the three of them.

"Fred, George, give Harry some room to breathe," Ron interrupted, walking over to the group. "That is, of course, unless you want to let me in on what you're whispering about over here."

Fred and George looked at each other and then to Harry and back to their brother. They both shook their heads. "Us whispering?" they asked in unison.

"Nah, not us," George supplied.

"Couldn't be, what would we have to whisper about?" Fred added.

The twins then winked at Harry and left him standing with Ron. Harry shook his head at the twin's antics. They'd never change. Harry turned to Ron and shrugged his shoulders. Ron rolled his eyes.

"So what do you think of the Burrow, Mate," Ron asked.

"It's perfect," Harry said with a genuine smile. "It's the best house I've ever been in."

Ron shrugged, turning slightly pink. "It's not much, but it's home. Come on, I'll show you my room, that's where you'll be sleeping. It's at the top." Harry nodded and let Ron help him with his trunk.

--

After receiving their Hogwarts' letters, as well as a letter from Hermione, Mrs. Weasley decided on a visit to Diagon Alley. After thinking it through for a bit on what he wanted to purchase, Harry had decided that he really needed to take a trip down Knockturn Alley. Of course, he couldn't do this with all the Weasleys around him, so he chose to "mispronounce" the name and once again found himself inside Borgin and Burkes.

He had dressed simply in black, black pants and black long sleeved shirt, with his black Hogwarts cloak, the hood pulled up over his head.

He'd charmed the insignia's off. He didn't want to draw too much attention to himself while in the alley. He didn't stick around inside the shop this time though and slipped out just before Lucius and Draco Malfoy entered. Harry rolled his eyes as he made his way deeper into the dark alley. He held his wand firmly in his hand and had it visible so those around him would know not to mess with him.

Harry didn't spend long in Knockturn. He was after a book that he couldn't get in Diagon Alley. In fact, he couldn't get it anywhere else in the world, at least according to the Dark Lord who had said that he had found it in a rare bookshop in Knockturn Alley. That was right before he had used several of the dark spells from it on him; including the one that had given him the curse scar that would not allow him to say the Dark Lord's name without feeling excruciating pain. Harry was hoping he'd find a reversal spell.

Harry only knew of one rare bookshop in Knockturn and he entered it with strong determined strides. The owner immediately stood up straighter. "May I help you," he asked.

"Yes," Harry hissed with a combination of both English and Parseltongue. He cringed, he hadn't actually meant to, but there were several Parseltongue speaking books on a nearby shelf and it just kind of slipped out that way. The owner took a step back. Harry was glad he had made sure to put his hood up, hiding his face in shadow. He wasn't about to let anyone know that he was a Parseltongue so soon. Not to mention the field day the press would surely have if they knew Harry Potter was doing business in Knockturn Alley. "I want Verdammt und die Dunkelheit," Harry said with a soft yet commanding voice. Harry thought it sounded kind of silly coming out of someone so young, but the shop owner seemed to be taking him seriously for a change.

"Of course, one moment, and I'll have the book you request," the shop owner's voice was rather shaky and he bowed before he backed out of the room. Harry thought that he should have done this the last time he was shopping, he certainly got more respect, but it was probably something to do with the shop owner thinking him the Dark Lord or something ridiculous like that. Harry rolled his eyes



angrily when the owner came back. "The book, on the house of course, my Lord," the owner said quietly, bowing again.

That confirmed it. Harry wasn't about to argue the fact that he wasn't the Dark Lord, he was too short after all. He took the book and quickly left. He was prepared to pay for the book, but he'd gladly take it for free. As long as he got the book, that was all he cared about.

Harry hid the book in his concealed book bag that he had under his cloak and strode to the lighter side of Knockturn so that he could leave the dingy alley behind and join the Weasley's. He wondered how long the rumor of the Dark Lord being in Knockturn Alley would take to circulate around the Death Eaters.

Harry was about to leave Knockturn when he looked into a grubby storefront window and saw something that he never thought he'd find so easily as it had taken a good week for Hermione, Ron, and him to hunt down, and that was with the clues left behind by Dumbledore. Harry looked up and down the alley and then entered the shop. Ignoring the shopkeeper, he went to the window display and picked up the second to last Horcrux that the Order had not been able to find.

"Excuse me, can I help ye?" The shop owner finally asked.

Harry turned around. "I'm buying these," he said immediately.

The foul looking man looked from Harry's hidden face and then to the object in his hand. "They ain't fer sale, so ye can just go on an' get."

Harry fingered the three conjoined bracelets. He was not leaving without them. He looked around, the shop was empty but for the shop owner. Harry took in a deep breath, making a decision. He raised his wand and quickly fired a very brief blinding hex and then he ran, dropping the bracelet into his bag as he went.

He didn't dare look back. He could hear the shop owner following him. Harry dodged around a rather large figure and noted it was Hagrid, before he ran out of Knockturn Alley and into Gringotts across the way. He skidded to a halt just inside the door, pulled off his hood, and

cancelled the concealment charm on his cloak so that the Hogwarts patch was clearly visible.

He then hurried up to one of the goblins at the counter. "I'd like to visit my vault please," he asked somewhat out of breath.

"Do you have your key?" The goblin asked. Harry looked briefly over his shoulder; the shop owner had followed him in and was looking around.

"Yes," Harry said, nodding his head as he pulled out his key.

"Follow me," the goblin drawled.

Harry followed the goblin, glancing back at the shop owner. He felt kind of guilty about stealing the bracelet, but he needed it to be destroyed if he had any chance at all of defeating the Dark Lord. Hermione had finally tracked down Rowena Ravenclaw's bracelet just three days before her and Ron were killed. Harry had to destroy the bracelet on his own after he had been rescued. He did it the same way he had destroyed the Diary his second year, as well as how he had destroyed the other Horcruxes, but one, with a basilisk fang, or more specifically the venom in the fang. Apparently, basilisk venom could corrode spell wards fairly quickly, like the ones holding a soul inside of a Horcrux.

Harry looked around his vault after they had arrived and unlocked it for him. He really didn't need anything there, but he had never really given himself a lot of time to look around it. There wasn't just gold in there and Harry, after wandering around the backside of the large mound of Wizarding currency, found a small trunk sitting against the back wall.

Intrigued, Harry knelt down, unlatched the trunk, and opened it. Tears instantly sprang to his eyes. It was filled with pictures, some Muggle, but most Wizarding. There were pictures of him and his Mum and Dad when he was a baby, pictures of their school days, pictures of them as they were children with their parents, his grandparents. This was the most treasured find he had ever come across and he wished he had found it sooner.

Harry closed the lid, wiped his eyes dry, and picked the trunk up. There were few other things that grabbed his attention and after a quick glance around, he returned to the goblin. Harry was about to leave the vault when he stopped, a thought coming to his mind.

“My family vault,” Harry said. “Do I have to be sixteen to have access to it?” he asked the goblin. He had never tried to obtain access to his family vault sooner. He hadn’t even known it existed until the summer after sixth year.

“Only with the permission of your magical guardian,” was the answer.

Harry thought for a moment, goblins usually didn’t talk. “And if my magical guardian is currently incarcerated?”

“You have no secondary guardian?” the goblin asked.

“Not as far as I know,” Harry answered truthfully.

“I’ll have to check with my superiors but I believe you can have limited access, though there are things you may not be able to remove until you are of age.” Harry nodded, he already knew that. “Then I will check with my superiors, Mister Potter, it shouldn’t take long.”

When Harry left Gringotts sometime later, after making sure the shop owner he had stolen from was nowhere in sight, he ran into Hagrid, literally. As he was carrying the trunk with the pictures in it, he was knocked backwards and landed particularly hard on his backside. He was so glad he had shrunk the Potter sword and put it in his bag, along with a few other items he had wanted from the vault.

There was much he hadn’t been able to take out, like the money and some of the more advanced books. But that was all right with Harry, he didn’t have much interest in it at the moment anyways. He did learn something though that he hadn’t known before. Alice Longbottom was his godmother.

“Arry, there yeh are. The Weasley’s are lookin’ fer yeh,” Hagrid said as he helped Harry to his feet. Harry nodded as he rubbed his back while clutching the small trunk with his other arm.

“Yeah, I figured they might be. I got spit out of the Floo at Gambol and Japes of all places, can you believe that? I think I mispronounced Diagon Alley,” Harry lied, chuckling a bit and not looking at Hagrid. “Decided to hit Gringotts on my way to catch up with the Weasley’s and I found a trunk full of pictures while I was there. Hagrid it’s amazing, there are so many of my mum and dad,” Harry said, a real smile on his face and he finally looked up to Hagrid.

“That’s great, ‘Arry!” Hagrid pat Harry on the shoulder overenthusiastically and Harry’s knees nearly buckled. “Come on then, the Weasley’s are all over at Madam Malkin’s, I’ll take yeh over there, Hermione’s with them as well.”

“Oh, great,” Harry said happily as he walked with Hagrid over to where the Weasley’s were. Harry saw Hermione and her parents first and Hermione in turn spotted him first.

“Harry!” she yelled and ran up to him. “Look at you, you’re covered in soot. Where did you end up?”

“Bo –” Harry snapped his mouth shut, he’d almost answered Borgin and Burks but caught himself and amended quickly. “Gambols and Japes, they really need to clean their Floo.” Harry didn’t meet Hermione’s eyes as he said this.

The rest of the Weasley’s soon followed Hermione and Mrs. Weasley started to brush him off, just as Hermione was doing. Harry colored a bit at the unnecessary attention as he repeated for the Weasley’s where he’d been, along with revealing his find at Gringotts. Hagrid soon left them, glancing over his shoulder at Harry as he went. Harry noticed this but shrugged it off and quickly forgot about it. The large group then all split up to get things done quicker.

About an hour later, Harry and the rest met up in Flourish and Blott’s. It didn’t take long for Harry to get his books as Harry avoided the line to the book signing for the fraud Gilderoy Lockhart. Harry loathed the

coming year in Defense Against the Dark Arts. Though it would give him another goal for the year, maybe he'd even get the twins in on it. Yeah, 'Project Get the Git Lockhart Sacked,' it seemed like a worthy plan to him.

Harry was sorting through his purchases when he looked up and saw the coming confrontation between the Weasley Head and Lucius Malfoy. He debated stopping the coming fight, but decided to let it continue as he sidled up next to Ginny. He watched with amusement as Arthur Weasley was obviously winning the tussle, not to mention that the twins were egging on the fight.

Finally, Hagrid came and broke up the fight and Harry saw his chance. Just as Lucius was about to thrust Ginny her book, Harry intercepted and slid the black diary from it and handed Ginny the Transfiguration book. Harry pulled from his pocket a single sock. "Oh, Mister Malfoy," Harry said loudly. Lucius turned to Harry as Harry held up the diary. "I think this belongs to you."

Harry thrust it into a shocked Lucius' hands. Dobby as per his agreement with Harry popped into the bookstore just beside Lucius. "Mays Dobby takes your things for you, sir?" Lucius looked livid at Harry but then thrust the diary into Dobby's hands absently. Harry couldn't believe that had just worked, again; moronic Death Eater!

"Come, Dobby," Lucius sneered as he cuffed Draco on the shoulder and steered him in the direction of the door. Dobby didn't move; he looked up to Harry instead.

Harry mouthed 'open it' at Dobby and Dobby did. "A sock, master has given Dobby a sock. Master has given Dobby clothes, Dobby is free," Dobby squealed.

"WHAT!" Lucius shouted as he rounded on Harry.

Harry shrugged and smirked at Lucius. "Oops."

"You've lost me my servant, boy!" Malfoy drew his wand and Harry took a step back as Dobby raised his hand.

“You shall not harm Lord Harry Potter!” the elf shouted, and with a bang, Malfoy was thrown out of the shop. Draco scurried after him, neither remembering the diary. Harry looked at the house elf with a raised eyebrow. Lord?

The shop was rather quiet. Harry turned to see almost all of the customers and shopkeepers, including the Weasley’s and Granger’s, staring at him. Harry ran his hand through his hair sheepishly. “House Elf enslavement is so wrong,” Harry said and shrugged when everyone kept staring at him. He turned back to Dobby. “Dobby would you like to work for me, I will of course pay you,” Harry said seriously.

With the book still in his hand, Dobby threw his arms around Harry’s legs and hugged him. Harry laughed and then relieved Dobby of the diary. He quickly stashed it into his bag. This had all worked out far better than Harry had thought it would. He now had three Horcruxes in his possession and Dobby would certainly come in handy later.

The next morning his picture was all over the Daily Prophet with articles entitled; ‘Potter Against House Elf Enslavement’ and ‘Potter Pays House Elves’, and one small one, ‘Malfoy Loses House Elf to Harry Potter’.

--

Harry with a wide yawn and a long sigh slid into his seat on the Hogwarts Express. The Weasley’s and Harry had actually left early as Harry kept off handedly reminding Fred, George, and Ginny about things that he knew they would forget. When he had reminded Ginny about her diary, she had looked at him funny and said that she didn’t keep a diary. Harry just shrugged, and stared off into space as he realized that Ginny had been writing in Tom’s diary before they had even gotten to school. He had then, never even noticed her with it.

Ron soon entered the compartment, followed by Ginny, and then Hermione a short while later. Harry and Hermione simultaneously pulled out a book for the long journey. They both received scandalous looks from Ron before he shrugged at their raised eyebrows and started a game of Exploding Snaps with Ginny. Not long later, Neville joined their compartment and joined in on the game. Hermione and

Harry both rolled their eyes when Fred and George appeared and the game of Snaps exploded into a war, which Hermione and Harry did their best to ignore, even as Fred and George tried to get the two to join in.

Harry was just getting to chapter two of an actually interesting potions text when their compartment door opened and Draco Malfoy swaggered in, Crabbe and Goyle behind him. Harry glanced up at him, but did little else. Ron however stood up, probably rather emboldened by the fact that his brothers were in the compartment, and who would be insane enough to mess with the Weasley twins?

“What do you want, Malfoy?” Ron sneered, doing a fair impression of Draco himself.

“What, Weasel, can’t stand the sight of your betters?” Draco mocked. The twins glared up at the blond idiot.

“Only when my betters are far from better than me,” Ron retorted.

“Is that the best you’ve got, Weasley? Maybe your friend Potter over there can come up with something more intelligent,” Draco scoffed and looked over to Harry.

Harry barely even rolled his eyes and only slightly glared up at him. “For Slytherin’s sake, Malfoy, is the animosity you have with my friends and me because your father wishes it or is it because we are Gryffindors? If it’s just because we’re in Gryffindor, you really should let the house rivalry go. We’ve got another six years together in the same school and I for one am tired of fighting with you,” Harry said this all very calmly, his book still perched on his knees as he leaned against the compartment wall. The others mouths all dropped open, all but Draco who continued to stare at Harry for nearly a minute before he huffed and left the compartment, his two goons following him silently.

“Harry, I didn’t realize you were that serious about the house rivalries,” Hermione said as she put her book aside.

Harry shrugged tiredly and then a thought came to his mind, a way to help get Sirius' name cleared. Harry stood up, closed their compartment door, and then turned back to his group of friends. "At the end of last year when I was down in the chamber with You-Know-Who, he told me something that made me realize that it doesn't matter what house you are in."

"What did he tell you, Harry?" Ron asked, losing some color in his cheeks as he remembered the happenings of the end of the previous year.

Harry sat back down. "My dad had three best friends while he was at Hogwarts. I've shown some of the pictures to you and Hermione, Ron." Ron and Hermione nodded. "Though I don't know much about them," Harry lied. "I do know that their friendship continued after Hogwarts. When my parents went into hiding, they used a charm called the Fidelius. It requires a person to keep their location secret, a Secret Keeper. I looked it up," Harry clarified, when Hermione looked at him curiously, before he continued. "One of their friends, a guy named Black was supposed to be their Secret Keeper but my parents changed at the last second to their other friend Pettigrew. Pettigrew was working for the Dark Lord all along and he's the one who gave up my parent's location. He's the one responsible for my mum and dad's death," Harry said sadly, with anger in his voice. The twins both glanced at each other, their eyes widening slightly.

"Harry, you've known about this all summer? Why didn't you tell us sooner?" Hermione asked as she put her hand over Harry's on the seat.

Harry shook his head and his eyes glided over the rat huddled in its small cage next to Ron. "It doesn't matter, according to You-Know-Who, Pettigrew's dead. So there's nothing I can do about it. But that is also why I decided to stop with the house rivalry. My dad and all his friends were in Gryffindor. Pettigrew was in Gryffindor!" Harry growled.

"A You-Know-Who supporter in Gryffindor?" whispered Ron with a speculative look on his face, "Blimey." Harry nodded again glancing coldly at the rat, he didn't notice Ron's pensive look, nor did he see the four Weasley's and Neville all glance at each other.



Most of the rest of the train ride was spent in silence. Harry had really given his friends something to think about, he just hoped it wasn't too much for them to think about. Harry barely noticed as one by one the twins, Neville, Ron, and Ginny all disappeared leaving Hermione and Harry alone. It was Hermione who looked up from her book and commented on it.

"Where'd everyone go?" she asked, putting her book aside.

Harry finally looked up from his own book. "You know, I hadn't even noticed them leave."

Harry had just finished his statement when Ron, Ginny, and Neville returned. Harry and Hermione gave them questioning looks. The three averted their eyes from Harry and started to pull out their robes to change into. That was when the train began to slow, and the announcement came on about them arriving at Hogwarts. Harry shrugged and put his own book aside to change into his robes as well.

They were all ready to go just as the train pulled into Hogsmeade station. The group left Ginny to the other first years and got a carriage with the twins that appeared out of nowhere. Harry ignored the Thestrals that were clearly visible to him as he climbed into the carriage. He however didn't ignore that the twins wouldn't look him in the eyes, and neither would anyone else but Hermione. He was about to comment on it when they arrived at the castle and they all piled out of the carriage.

The six of them walked into the Great Hall together. Ron nudged Harry in the ribs and pointed up to the nearly full head table. "Where do you reckon Snape is? Think he's ill?"

Harry half shrugged, still wondering what was up with his friends. "I'm sure he's around here somewhere, Ron."

"Maybe he left, or got sacked," Ron said enthusiastically. "I mean everyone hates –"

"I don't, Ron," Harry interrupted Ron before he could get himself into trouble with the potion's master Harry knew was following them up the aisle. Ron looked incredulously at him. "What? I don't. He's a good teacher," Harry said honestly and the twins tried not to snicker as they looked past Ron and quickly took their seats.

"I can't believe you're sucking up to that git and he's not even standing here!" Ron blurted.

"On the contrary, Mister Weasley, I am."

Ron lost all color in his face and his mouth did a perfect imitation of a fish as he turned around to find Snape standing before him. "I mean, w-what I meant w-was —"

"I'm sure I know perfectly well what you meant. Twenty points from Gryffindor for disrespecting a Professor, Weasley," Snape sneered with satisfaction.

Ron looked as if he were about to argue that they didn't have any points for him to take away from yet, but Malfoy beat him to it. "Losing points on the first day, Weasley?" Draco scoffed. "I'm surprised it wasn't Potter, he's the one with the bigger mouth."

Snape looked at Draco coolly and then he turned back to Harry. "Thirty points to Gryffindor, Mr. Potter, you did some excellent potions work this summer." Harry's mouth nearly fell open at that and many students turned to stare at Snape as if he'd lost his mind. A smirk came to Snape's lips and before he turned to continue on his way to the Head Table, he looked back at Harry. "And ten points from Gryffindor for sucking up to a Professor, Potter."

Harry stared back at Snape for a moment before he shrugged and sat down at the Gryffindor table. Ron followed, grumbling under his breath about not being allowed to keep the points as he did.

"Well at least we're tied with everyone else again," Hermione said quietly, that tie being zero. Ron just rolled his eyes and put his head on the table to wait for the sorting and the feast to start.

--

A/N: And another chapter.

## Chapter Seven – Getting Caught

Harry stormed out of the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom. He was the first to flee having no inhibitions about leaving his friends behind to take care of the mess after the class he had just had. He was irritated as all hell. He had managed to avoid Lockhart for the first week and a half with the exception of Defense class. So he was most utterly mortified and enraged when Lockhart had tried to pin him as an attention grabbing celebrity in front of the whole class, again.

The first time had been when Harry had torn up his preposterous test on the first day of Defense Against the Dark Arts. Harry had stood up and called him a fraud to his face, with a scandalized rebuke from Hermione and a cheer from Ron, but the idiot just brushed it aside and unleashed the hellish neon blue pixies onto the unsuspecting class. Harry had made sure he and the other Gryffindors had gotten out without having to clean up that one. But this time, Harry just needed time alone and away from everyone else. Besides, if he hadn't stormed out of class he wouldn't be held responsible for his actions against the bigheaded idiot.

As he knew his friends would be tied up for some time, Harry took the opportunity to visit a new friend finally. He'd wanted to do this much sooner, but there had always been someone around, even with his friends randomly disappearing, which was starting to irk him to no end, especially when Hermione was apparently let in on the secret.

Harry walked the deserted corridors to the second floor and slipped unnoticed into Moaning Myrtle's bathroom. He looked around and was relieved that there wasn't anyone there, not even Myrtle. Harry figured the ghost was probably off haunting another part of the castle.

He quickly walked up to the sink that led into the Chamber and after casting a silencing charm over the bathroom, hissed in Parseltongue for the Chamber to open. The sink sunk into the floor and Harry smiled when he saw the stairs cleverly hidden in plain sight. The stairs were charmed to look like the rest of the pipe, so it wasn't any surprise that he had never seen them before. But now he knew what he was looking for.

Harry walked down the steep stairs and into the tunnel system that ran under the school. As soon as he got to the bottom, the torches lining the walls sprung to life. He looked down the large tunnel and saw that a long snakeskin took up a big portion of the tunnel. He made his way passed it and then to the true entrance to the Chamber. He hissed for it to open and it did.

Harry moved through the entrance and into the Chamber. "Mort?" he called in Parseltongue. There was a slithering sound and then Mortedolv appeared from one of the connecting tunnels.

"Harry, it is good to see you again," Mort said as he came up to Harry.

Harry smiled. "It's good to see you as well. I'm sorry I couldn't come sooner. I have a feeling that it will become difficult for me to visit. My friends are around me most of the time and they don't know about the Chamber or my heritage."

"Perhaps one day you will be able to share this secret with your friends," Mort said as he muzzled Harry's left hand. He pulled back almost immediately. "Such darkness," he hissed and the hiss sent a shiver down Harry's spine.

Harry looked to his feet. "I must reveal something to you..."

"I know. You are from the future. But you did not have this darkness the last time we met. What has happened?"

Harry looked up at the serpent. "You know?" Harry asked; the snake stared back at him, awaiting an answer. "My past, my future, has come to haunt me. The Dark Lord, Tom Riddle, had captured me before I returned to the past. He tortured me for many days and branded me. I am once again marked by him and Death. Marks I will carry for the rest of my life I fear. That's where the darkness comes from," Harry said solemnly, bitterly.

"Your magic has been unblocked as well, Young Heir," Mort commented.

“Yes it has. I will need the full use of my magic in the coming years. Had I known it would bring the Dark Mark and the Death Mark to me, I would have made do with my limited magic.”

“I am sorry that you have been branded with such darkness, it must be a heavy burden for you to carry,” Mort said with his words laced with pity. A pity Harry did not want, but accepted in the face of the gigantic snake.

“But a burden I will continue to carry until I can find a way of ridding myself of it, which you may be able to help me with.” Harry reached into his bag and pulled out Tom Riddle’s Diary and Rowena Ravenclaw’s Bracelet. He carried them with him wherever he went so they wouldn’t have a chance of falling into the wrong hands. “With your venom I can destroy the Horcruxes residing in these and be that much closer to ridding the world of the Dark Lord and the Dark Mark on my arm. Will you help me?”

Mort stared at Harry for a long moment before he nodded. “I will, Young Heir.”

--

Harry lost track of time in the Chamber with Mort and the Founder’s Library. He was too engrossed in a charms book written by Salazar. Harry had no idea the man was so good at Charms. He would have thought Potions and the Dark Arts would have been his expertise, but actually, it was Charms and Runes. It was Helga who excelled in Potions and Godric who fancied everything Dark Arts. Rowena loved Herbology and was past mastery level with Transfiguration, a huge feat for the age she was when the founders started Hogwarts. She in fact had three Animagus forms. Something Harry didn’t think was possible. At least according to McGonagall it wasn’t. Harry would love to see her face were she to find out otherwise.

Harry’s eyes lit up at the next charm he read about. He stopped reading and looked over at Mort. “Mort?” he asked absently while he was thinking.

“Yes, Harry?”

Harry shook his head, "Never-mind." What was he thinking? Mort would probably eat him for suggesting it.

"What is it, Harry?" Mort asked, lifting his head from his curled up position.

"It's nothing," Harry said, going back to his book, but then he looked up again. He couldn't help it, it was too tempting. "Actually," Harry said hesitantly, Mortedolv was still looking at him. "I just came across this charm in one of Salazar's books. It's a shrinking charm... designed for use on animals..." Harry could swear he saw the serpent narrow his eyes at him and he looked away quickly. "Never-mind, forget I mentioned it."

"Would I be allowed out of the chamber?" Mort asked after a moment.

Harry's eyes shot back up to the snake's eyes. "Well yes, I suppose."

"All right, but if you mess this charm up, I am going to eat you." Harry nodded and half laughed, not knowing if the serpent was being serious or not, Mortedolv tended to have a dry sense of humor.

Harry picked up his wand, and then looking over the directions three more times, he aimed it at the serpent. He cleared his throat. Please, please, please, let this work, Harry thought furiously before he performed the charm, which really wasn't that complicated. Harry watched with fascination as Mort shrunk down to the size of a baby boa constrictor. After the spell was complete, Harry walked over to the much smaller basilisk. He wasn't moving and he had his eyes closed.

Harry crouched down and poked the snake cautiously. "You dead, Mort?"

"Poke me again and I will bite you," Mort hissed looking up at Harry irritably. Harry jumped in surprise, pulling back his hand. "You have no idea how strange this feels. I feel like I am a hatchling again."

“Actually I kind of do, maybe not to such an extreme, but I was seventeen when I died. It was rather disturbing waking up in the body of an eleven-year-old.”

“I am used to you looking up to me, not the other way around,” Mort mumbled as Harry picked him up. Harry chuckled, glancing at his watch as he did.

“Hmm,” Harry hummed, his laugh falling silent as he took in the hands of the clock pointed at one and twelve and then his eyes widened. “Bullocks!” Harry cursed. It was one o'clock in the morning, and he didn't have his invisibility cloak with him!

“What is wrong?” Mortedolv asked as he circled around Harry's neck, being mindful of the curse scar there.

“It's one o'clock in the morning, and way passed curfew. People are going to be looking for me. I'll have to get up to the seventh floor without being spotted.” Harry was silent for a moment, thinking. “Or have a good enough excuse for being out of bounds,” he added. Mort didn't comment. Harry gathered up his bag and the book on Wizarding language translators by Ravenclaw that he wanted to use to look for a charm that would allow him to read *Verdammt und die Dunkelheit*. After all, the whole book was in German and Harry didn't speak a word of the language.

Harry stored the book in his bag and then started to head, with Mort out of Salazar's Chambers. He was just about to leave the sitting area at the entrance when he side glanced at a mirror that hung at an odd angle on a rather blank wall, and then did a double take of the mirror. Harry wouldn't have taken any notice of it normally, except that there wasn't anything on the wall nearby and it was showing Dumbledore's office or more specifically a meeting taking-place in Dumbledore's office.

“Mort, what is that?” Harry asked walking up to the obscure mirror.

Mortedolv looked at the mirror. “I believe that is Salazar's spy mirror, Harry. I am fairly certain that you can see most anywhere in the castle with that. He used to say an incantation and tap it with his



wand and he would be able to hear as well. But I do not remember the incantation.” Mort explained.

Harry looked up and down the mirror and pulled out his wand. “Ausculto,” he whispered and suddenly Harry could hear the people sitting in Dumbledore’s office.

“That would be the incantation,” Mort hissed dryly. Harry shrugged, after reading many of Salazar’s texts he discovered the man was never one for obscurities, so the listening incantation seemed to be the most obvious. He was right.

“Now that pleasantries have been dispersed and term business has been concluded. There is something I must reveal to you all for the safety of both the school and a particular student,” Dumbledore said somberly, suddenly looking much older. The other Professors and staff perked up significantly, as they waited for the headmaster to continue. “I am worried about Mr. Potter.”

“When are you not?” Snape said snidely and Harry smirked.

Dumbledore glared at him before continuing, but didn’t censure his attitude. “I hadn’t wanted to alert any of you, but this summer young Harry visited Hogwarts. Not only did he break through the wards on the gates as if there were no wards at all, but he also, and I cannot fathom how he knew how, Apparated here.” There were shocked expressions on all but Snape’s face. Who did not look at Dumbledore as the rest of the staff did.

“Are you certain he Apparated, Albus, it could have been a Portkey,” McGonagall suggested.

“Quiet certain, Minerva. I was able to trace his Apparation signature back to Privet Drive and he received a warning from the Ministry, both for the use of underage magic and for illegal Apparation.” McGonagall looked pensive at that.

“That must not have been pleasant for young Potter,” Flitwick commented. “There are reasons for laws against underage Apparation.”

"Indeed, Filius, but the Apparation is not what has me worried. It is why he came to Hogwarts in the first place. When he arrived this summer, he disappeared into a girl's bathroom on the second floor for several hours. This obviously is worrisome to me in itself, but after he left he went to the Hospital Wing and stole several vials of Dreamless Sleep Potion and a bottle of Strengthening Potion of maximum strength." Dumbledore was quiet for a few moments as the staff members around him took in this information; all but Snape had a confused look on their faces. "I don't believe I have to tell you how dangerous mixing those potions could be."

"It creates a fast acting poison of which there is no cure," Snape said quietly, looking to be in deep thought for a moment. "It is why they are not easily bought by the public, also the Maximum Strengthening Potion is very difficult to make. However, I do not believe that was Mr. Potter's intent, Albus." The rest of the staff looked at Snape and then back to Dumbledore, realization just dawning on them.

"Are you quite certain of that? The boy has been cutting himself, Severus." Dumbledore said morosely, and the others gasped.

"Yes I am certain," Snape said firmly. Dumbledore looked at him as if he didn't believe the man. Snape rolled his eyes. "I ran into Mr. Potter in Diagon Alley and he told me about his trip to Hogwarts this summer."

"He told you this? And you said nothing to me about it," Dumbledore said, a hint of anger in his voice.

"I had no authority to punish him outside of school, as Mr. Potter so promptly reminded me, and I saw the warning he had gotten from the ministry sufficient enough to convince him not to do it again. He has been having trouble sleeping since the incident at the end of the last school year, I'm sure you can understand why, Headmaster," Snape lied very convincingly; he even looked Dumbledore in the eyes as he did. Harry was impressed; he could never look the headmaster in the eyes and lie to him. But then again it wasn't entirely a lie.

“He told you about Quirrell then?” Dumbledore said quietly and Snape’s eyes narrowed marginally, Harry hadn’t told him about Quirrell.

“Yes,” Snape nodded, recovering quickly, though Harry could see profound curiosity in Snape’s eyes and was sure the man would ask him as soon as he got his hands on him.

“And the Strengthening Potion?” asked Dumbledore, conveniently dropping the subject of the late Professor Quirrell.

“A mistake I would assume,” Snape said dismissively.

Dumbledore nodded slowly, though he seemed to be in deep thought. Harry hoped the man was considering Snape’s words, he didn’t like the idea of the headmaster or the staff thinking he was going to off himself at any moment. That isn’t to say that he hadn’t ever thought about it, but really he had quite a bit to live for now, unlike before where he had lost everyone he’d ever loved.

The old wizard took in a deep breath. “Mr. Potter is missing.”

A collective gasp followed and Harry let out a small laugh before falling silent. He would have found that rather more amusing if it didn’t mean that he was in serious danger of getting caught. This was not good; it was still only the second week of school.

“According to the portraits of that area, the same girl’s bathroom that he disappeared into this summer was the last place Mr. Potter was seen this afternoon. I have already had Miss Clearwater go in there and he was not there.” Dumbledore explained.

“Second floor girl’s bathroom,” commented McGonagall. “Is that not the bathroom in which Myrtle resides?”

“Yes, and I observed Harry speaking with her this summer. But the question is where he goes once he is in the bathroom. It is as if he simply vanishes,” Dumbledore said, and Harry smirked because the man looked quite baffled.

“Are you certain, Headmaster?” Snape suddenly questioned. “It is unlikely Mr. Potter can merely vanish from a bathroom.”

“I would agree with you, Severus; however the portraits say that they have not seen him leave the bathroom and I have had Mister Filch sitting outside since I was alerted by the portrait that he had gone in.”

“Damn,” Harry hissed. If Filch was still sitting outside of Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom, which he must be as he wasn’t at the staff meeting, then how was he supposed to get up to Gryffindor Tower without being seen? “Mort, do you know of another way out of the Chamber?”

The snake blinked a few times in thought before he answered. “There was once a way into the forest, but it has been blocked for several hundred years now,” Mort hissed unhelpfully. “However – yes – there is a way into the Slytherin dormitories which should still be open. Of course, I could be wrong; it has been since Salazar’s day that it has been used.”

“I suppose it’s my best chance if I don’t want them finding out about the Chamber,” Harry mumbled and then said, “Show me.”

Harry followed Mort out of Salazar’s Chamber and into the Chamber of Secrets. Mort led him down one of the larger tunnels that branched off the Chamber. It wasn’t long until they came to a dead end. Mort looked up at Harry. “I believe you can open the wall by touching it there,” Mort pointed his tail to a palm shaped indent in the otherwise plain wall.

Harry put his palm on the indent, a grinding noise was heard, and then the sound of rushing water. Harry watched the door open only to have water rush out over his feet and quickly up to his knees and then run into the Chamber. Mort quickly moved his way up to Harry’s waist and Harry pushed the wall back into place before the Chamber was flooded even more. “I believe that way is flooded,” Harry commented needlessly, as he pointed his wand at himself and muttered a drying charm.

"I am sorry, Harry, I know of no other way out," Mort said sympathetically.

"I suppose that I am caught then," Harry said resignedly, tiredly, and walked back to Salazar's Chamber. He arrived just in time to here Hagrid speaking rather hesitantly, obviously the conversation hadn't veered away from him yet.

"Professor Dumbledore, Sir, I wasn't goin' to say nothin' 'cause it's 'Arry an' all, but I think I saw him runnin' out of Knockturn Alley this summer, bein' chased by a shop owner, who was callin' him a thief. Now I don't know fer sure if it were him, but the lad runnin' away ran into Gringotts and not too long after 'Arry came out claimin' he'd Floo'd out 'o Gamble an' Japes an' had missed pronounced his destination," Hagrid said gruffly with the staff's attention on him. "I was goin' to question him on it, but he was so darn happy about findin' those pictures o' his parents, I just couldn't."

"I've Floo'd hundreds of times, Albus, and it doesn't seem likely that he'd end up in Gamble and Japes," commented Sprout.

"What do you suppose the boy was doing in Knockturn Alley, Albus?" McGonagall asked.

Dumbledore looked lost on what Hagrid had revealed. "I don't know, Minerva, but Pomona is correct it isn't likely that he'd end up at Gamble and Japes, but he could easily end up at Borgin and Burkes in the heart of Knockturn Alley... You didn't see the boy's face, Hagrid?"

"No, Sir, it could 'ave been anyone, but he 'ad his same height an' it looked like he was wearin' a Hogwarts cloak without the insignia, 'Arry's Hogwarts cloak to be specific."

"But if it were a simple mistake, why would he lie about it?" Flitwick questioned. "And why would he have stolen something in Knockturn Alley?"

Dumbledore sighed. "I believe those are all questions that Mr. Potter is going to have to answer when he is found."

“Shit,” Harry breathed.

His situation had just gone from bad to worse. At least being in Knockturn he could deny, but not being at Hogwarts. This was why he didn't like lying, lies always managed to spiral out of control. He watched the meeting, taking place in Dumbledore's office, for some time more, as more and more questions were raised about him, before he decided finally to take his chances with getting caught. They were all still in the meeting, hopefully he could slip past Filch and duck the portraits.

Harry with Mort wrapped around his neck made his way out of the Chambers. He had just come out of the Chamber of Secrets when Myrtle poked her head out of her stall. “Hello, Harry,” she said dreamily.

“Hello, Myrtle,” Harry answered morosely as the sink silently slid back into place, hiding the entrance.

“Professor Dumbledore has the entire staff, including the ghosts and the portraits looking for you, Harry,” Myrtle said with a bit of a sigh.

“I know, Myrtle. I spent too much time down there. I guess I'll go face them then. Filch is waiting outside in the corridor,” Harry said tiredly before he opened the door and stepped out into the hall. Myrtle followed him out. Harry turned back to her with a small sardonic smile on his face at the predicament he was in. “Myrtle, can I ask you what death is like?” Harry asked half jokingly, for surely his life was now over. Harry cringed slightly when it came out sounding rather more serious than he meant.

“Boring, Harry, very boring,” answered Myrtle and then floated back into the bathroom.

Harry looked left and right down the hallway; Filch was nowhere in sight. And neither were there any portraits, then what portrait was Dumbledore communicating with? Harry shrugged, he was really too tired to care and he was developing a headache.

One way led him back to Gryffindor Tower and the other would lead him further into the castle – Harry smirked to himself, why hadn't he thought of that before? – and to a passageway that led up to the fourth floor, near the Hogwarts Library. Harry, as silently as possible, walked away from the bathroom and towards said passageway. He was more than relieved when he reached the portrait that was the marker for the hidden passage; the portrait was of a sleepy village. Filch must have been waiting in the corridor in the direction of the tower as Harry hadn't come across him. There was still hope that he wouldn't get caught.

Harry raced up the narrow, dusty passageway, glad that he had managed to avoid Filch. He still didn't know what he would say if he got caught. How would he explain to Dumbledore that he had been in the Chamber of Secrets and had made friends with Salazar's Basilisk whose name was Mortedolv and was currently wrapped around his neck? Ha, yeah that would be one hell of a conversation. Though, the look on his headmaster's face would be priceless.

A few minutes later and Harry had just passed the portrait entrance into Gryffindor after giving the password. He stopped in his tracks and then immediately tried to go back when Professor McGonagall turned and spotted him.

Mort quickly moved so that he was hidden in Harry's robes and Harry had to hide a flinch when his friend almost slid over the scar on his neck. "Professor, I can explain," Harry lied quickly, breathless, from his run from the fourth floor. "I fell asleep in the Library."

McGonagall crossed her arms over her chest and glared at him, showing that she obviously did not believe him. "The library was searched, Mr. Potter. Would you care to try again?"

Harry sighed heavily, bollocks all to hell! It was his only way out. He'd have to deal with their disappointment as their thoughts would inevitably turn to his apparent suicidal tendencies; he just hoped that they didn't want to see his wrists. "I was talking to the ghost, Myrtle," Harry said quietly. McGonagall frowned. "Honest, Professor, you can ask her if you like."

“Be that as it may, Potter, the Headmaster has requested your presence.”

Harry nodded; he really wanted to ask if it could wait till morning but instead mumbled under his breath. “I assume that means now.” Harry followed McGonagall out of the Gryffindor common room, suppressing a yawn.

By the time they had reached the stone gargoyle, Harry was dragging his feet from the growing exhaustion that had been plaguing him since his last Dreamless Sleep Potion. As much as he had tried to limit the amount of times he took the potion, he was quickly becoming immune to it. He had used it as much as he could without doing himself severe physical harm while staying the last few weeks with the Weasleys. He had managed to wake Ron up once with his nightmares and that was enough incentive to take the potion more than he normally should. He didn't want to worry his friends about the nightmares that he couldn't even explain to them.

Harry hadn't slept well the last couple of weeks as he had run his supply dry and his nightmares continued undaunted. Most of them being about the death of Ginny, Ron, and Hermione, some were even about his torture, but not as many as about his friend's deaths. Most nights he only got a couple of hours sleep and the only reason no one had noticed Harry's fatigue was because he was using the Strengthening Potion in small doses to keep himself going, but he'd run out of that three mornings ago.

Harry knew it wasn't healthy, but now that he was at school, he was putting up Silencing Charms until he could use the Dreamless Sleep Potion again, that way his dorm mates wouldn't hear his screams. Harry wasn't embarrassed about his nightmares, he had fair cause for them, but he didn't want to have to explain them to anyone. It was best that they didn't know at all.

So focused on putting one foot in front of the other to keep himself walking, he didn't notice that they had reached Dumbledore's office until he was standing in it. Harry seemed to snap out of his drowsy state almost immediately as he noticed that the room was still full with professors, he didn't think that he'd have an audience to this.



"Mr. Potter, where have you been?" Dumbledore questioned right off, not so much as offering Harry a seat or a lemon drop.

"Moaning Myrtle's bathroom, on the second floor, Sir," Harry answered honestly and politely.

"Why were you there?" the headmaster asked, his eyes not leaving Harry.

"At first I went there to talk to her. I met her last year at the end of term and she's a good listener," Harry didn't look at Dumbledore as he said this quietly, but at his shoes. "I'm sorry. I fell asleep. No one uses that bathroom and the only one ever there is Myrtle. I just wanted someplace to sit and think alone," Harry explained, purposely looking very sorry, hoping that the headmaster would not question him further.

Dumbledore was silent for a long moment, a moment where Harry almost believed that his hopes were going to be fulfilled, which was why he was slightly caught off guard when the headmaster finally spoke again. "Mr. Potter, why were you at Hogwarts this summer?" Harry's eyes shot up to the headmaster's. Oh, why did he have to ask that? What the hell was he going to say? The truth? That would go over well.

Harry was just about to play ignorant, but never got the chance as Snape hissed in pain and clasped his left forearm. Everyone had turned to him wide eyed and worried, so no one was watching to see Harry clasp his own left forearm with his right hand. Though their heads did turn back to Harry, when he let out a strangled scream and clutched his head in agony. He collapsed, unconscious before he hit the floor.

--

A/N: A little cliffy.

## Chapter Eight – I Too Am Back

As Harry opened his eyes he immediately knew he wasn't fully conscious. His first clue was that he was standing in a long dark hallway, though he could feel his body still lying on the stone floor of the headmaster's office; it was a very bizarre feeling, being in two places at once. The second reason Harry knew he wasn't conscious, was that the Dark Lord was standing in front of him, in all his hideous glory, with an evil smirk on his face.

"My Lord," Harry forced out through clenched teeth. He didn't know if he said that only in his mind, but hoped he did.

"I see you remember me, Harry, good, that explains why I awoke in the past." Harry stared in shock at the Dark Lord.

"It was you!" Harry snarled. "What did you do, beg the Fates for another chance at life?"

Riddle laughed humorlessly. "It was simply another counter measure should you somehow manage to defeat me. Though I was not supposed to awaken in the past, nor were you supposed to be alive!" he snarled angrily.

"You know, Vol –" Harry hissed in pain, knowing instantly that his body was feeling that ten times more than he currently was. He was rather glad he was in his mind; he didn't feel pain so acutely. Harry shook the pain off as the Dark Lord laughed at his discomfort. "You know, I was actually looking forward to death when I died," Harry bit out.

"I am more than willing to grant you death again," the Dark Lord snarled. "Crucio!"

Harry tried to move out of the way of the curse, but it didn't come from a wand, but all around him, there was nowhere for him to go. It washed over him in agonizing waves and Harry felt as if he was falling as a scream was ripped out of his throat. He could feel his body convulsing, and knew he was screaming outside of his mind as well. Harry fully expected that the curse would be lifted after a few

moments, but as he collapsed in on himself the pain only intensified. He was going to die, again. Riddle was killing him!

“Your mind is weak, Boy!” Harry barely registered the Dark Lord’s cruel laugh. As the pain again grew, Harry curled up into a fetal position, his screams having stopped as his voice was ripped out of him. The Dark Lord laughed insanely as he watched Harry scratch at his own skin as he wreathed under the curse. “Let me show you something, Harry, before you are driven to insanity!”

Harry found his voice again as he cried out as flashes of his friends dying tore through his mind like black and white Muggle photographs. Hermione, Ron, Ginny, all at the ages they currently were. “NO!” Harry grated out, his eyes tightly shut against the onslaught of images.

“Oh yes, Potter! You brought us back to the past and now you will be the first to die!” The pain increased again and Harry knew he couldn’t take much more; his mind was going to snap.

Harry was just starting to plea for death when the pain suddenly stopped, leaving Harry breathless, and shaking. Harry opened his eyes to look up at the Dark Lord but instead of Riddle, Snape stood in his place a look of intense concentration on his face.

“Focus, Harry, I can’t hold him back much longer, you need to wake up; NOW!”

Snape’s voice was like a lighting strike in his mind and Harry’s eyes snapped open to the soft candlelight of the Headmaster’s office. He was laying on his back and his arms and legs were being held down. Harry’s body shuddered with painful aftershocks and his breathing was ragged, but Merlin, he was alive.

“Harry?” Snape’s concerned voice came softly to his ears, followed by Dumbledore’s a little louder when he didn’t respond. Harry didn’t even realize he was sobbing until he was slowly released. Harry bit back another sob and took in a deep breath as he turned his eyes to meet those of the Professors.

Harry groaned as he tasted blood in his mouth and felt it running down from his nose and scar. "Why is it always me?" Harry whimpered pathetically. And he heard a relieved sigh come from the people around him.

"Well he's not insane," Harry heard someone say, though he wasn't positive who it was.

Harry's eyes rolled around as a dizzy spell over took him and he knew he was going to lose consciousness. Harry's roaming gaze finally settled on Snape's onyx eyes. "Y-you saved me," Harry whispered weakly before he again passed out.

--

Harry woke up to the silence of the Hospital wing. He breathed in sharply as he remembered why he was here and a tear slid down from the corner of his eye. Harry stared out of a window across from him and into the morning sky, wishing beyond anything that it was all a dream and the Dark Lord had not followed him into the past. But the aches throughout his entire body were clear evidence that it was no dream.

Harry shuddered as he wrapped his arms around himself. He was terrified, more than terrified. He was twelve years old. He may have the mind and memories of a seventeen-year-old, but he was physically only twelve. He couldn't deal with this. Harry buried his face into his pillow, but then quickly lifted his head at the familiar hissing sound not too far from his face. Harry looked up to be staring into Mortedolv's eyes.

"Mort," Harry hissed quietly as he grabbed his glasses from the bedside table and settled them onto his face.

Mort slithered down to rest on Harry's chest. "Are you well, Harry?"

Harry nodded. "A bit sore, but I'll be fine, I've been through worse."

"You scared me, and all the others. The one who smells of potions and darkness saved you, do you remember?" Mort asked.

Harry nodded. "How long have I been asleep?"

"This is the morning of the sixth day since you've been attacked. Many people have come and gone, but I hid while they were here. Was it Tom who attacked your mind?"

"Yes, he's followed me into the past. Mort, I don't know how I'm going to defeat him again. If he gains his body back, I'm dead. I'm not strong enough yet," Harry expressed his fears to his friend.

"We will find a way. You are protected inside Hogwarts; the school always watches over its Protector while he still remains loyal to the school," Mort said with conviction.

Harry nodded solemnly as he looked around the deserted ward. Noticing that Madam Pomfrey was nowhere in sight and having the need to go to the bathroom, Harry decided to chance trying to make it to the nearby bathroom himself. Harry slipped out of bed a little unsteadily at first, but managed to push past the pain caused by his aching body. Mort slipped off his chest and onto the floor and watched him as he found his footing and walked the distance to the bathroom.

After taking care of his needs, Harry found his school robes sitting in a neat pile on a nightstand and returned to the bathroom to change. Harry pulled off his shirt and gasped in shock as he looked at his torso and arms in the bathroom mirror.

"Mort," Harry hissed loudly and the snake slithered his way hurriedly into the bathroom.

"Yes, Harry?" the miniature basilisk hissed in concern.

"The Death Mark and the Dark Mark, they're gone!" Harry said in shock, still looking at his reflection in the mirror.

The snake shook his head. "No, Harry," Mort said regretfully. "I'm using my magic to conceal them, so others would not see." Suddenly both marks faded back into existence and Mort seemed to sag in relief, obviously it was taking a lot of concentration for Mort to keep the glamour in place. "I'm sorry, but they were removing your clothing."

Harry nodded his head in understanding as he surveyed the Dark Mark on his forearm. It was pure black and red and swollen around the edges, looking almost as if it were new, a clear indication that the Dark Lord really was back. Harry didn't think that he had gained his body back though. While Riddle had him trapped in his own mind, Harry got the impression that he was angry to be in the past, indicating to Harry that the Dark Lord was still just as vulnerable as Harry was, maybe even more so if he was still in wraith form. Harry knew that if the Dark Lord had the ability to get in his mind then he was already ahead of the schedule and well on his way to gaining his body back. It was only a matter of time.

"Thank-you," Harry hissed to Mort and then pulled on his shirt to cover the hideous marks.

Harry finished dressing and then picked up Mort and hid the serpent inside of his robes. He knew he shouldn't leave the Hospital Wing and that Madam Pomfrey would skin him alive if he were caught, but Harry was starving and he could already smell breakfast wafting through the castle and Harry's stomach gave an audible grumble of protest at the lack of food.

Harry quickly made his way through the halls and only hesitated slightly before entering the already full Great Hall. There was an audible gasp and then the Hall went deathly silent as the four Heads of Houses and Dumbledore stood up from the Head Table in shock. Harry stopped in his tracks at all the sudden attention. Why did he always have to be the one under the spotlight?

"What?" Harry snapped irritably at the entirety of the Hall as the teachers left their seats to approach him.

“Mr. Potter, you’re awake,” Dumbledore said evenly, pointing out the obvious.

Harry fought not to roll his eyes. “So it would seem,” Harry said ominously, as he bit back a chuckle at the bizarre look Dumbledore gave him, and then he turned deadly serious. “Why didn’t you tell me?” Harry asked with an accusing tone. If the Dark Lord was returning sooner than before, then it would only help Harry not to be left in the dark about things that had got him in trouble the last time, and perhaps he could get some proper – and not on the sly – training out of it.

“Tell you what?” Dumbledore asked calmly, concern evident in his blue eyes.

“About the real reason my mum and dad died for me. ‘The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord!’” Harry said quietly, so as not to have the students hear. He had just a touch of bitterness and anger in his voice. He still resented that damn prophecy.

Dumbledore’s eyes widened comically. “He told you!”

“Of course he told me,” Harry spat. “He wants me dead, because he thinks I’m the only one who can kill him. But he’s wrong! I’m only twelve years old! I don’t stand a chance against him!” Harry nearly shouted; his voice cracking as his hopeless emotions took hold of him again. “I’m only twelve!” Harry cried and surprised himself and the already shocked Hall as he lunged into Snape’s arms as he was the closest to Harry and broke down as sobs wracked his small body. Merlin, he’d never live this down!

Snape showing astonishing concern for the boy, hugged Harry back comfortingly, and then guided him out of the Hall with the other Heads of Hogwarts following. The Great Hall was in immediate uproar and the rest of the professors had a hard time calming everyone down and so didn’t notice as two Gryffindors slid out of the Hall.

--

Harry found himself led back to the Hospital Wing and pushed back into bed. He sat against the headboard with his knees hugged to his chest and his head laying on his knees. He had stopped sobbing on his way back to the Hospital Wing but he hadn't spoken anything to anyone yet. Not even Madam Pomfrey who kept asking how he felt. It wasn't until Snape finally broke the silence that Harry looked up to the Professors.

"Harry, what did the Dark Lord tell you?" Snape asked.

Harry looked at Dumbledore, McGonagall, Flitwick, Sprout, and Snape. None of them but one was ready to hear that the Dark Lord that they all hoped was dead, was back, and gaining power by the minute, but Harry, hating having things kept from him, was going to tell them.

"He's – he's found a way to come back. A potion, I think he said before he cast the – the Cruciatus Curse on me," Harry whispered and the professors, well all but Snape, gasped. Though Snape's eyes widened as Harry stared at him, trying to convey his real meaning of 'found a way to come back,' and he sat down heavily on a nearby chair as he took in the gravity of the situation, unknown by the others. "He was going to kill me had Professor Snape not intervened when he did." Harry was quiet for a few minutes while the Professor's digested the information given. "All last year, when I looked at Quirrell and he looked back at me, my scar stung. Then I thought it was my imagination, but after the end of last year when I found out about the Dark Lord using him, I started thinking. That incident in Professor Dumbledore's office just confirmed it. I'm linked through my scar to him."

Dumbledore was very quiet throughout Harry's rationalization; the others were still trying to wrap their minds around this when he finally spoke. "It is as I feared," Dumbledore said quietly, the others all looked at him.

"You knew about this, Albus?" McGonagall questioned sternly.



"I had suspected they may be connected," Dumbledore said quietly. "Tell me, Harry; is there anything special that you can do that others cannot? Perhaps you know more about something than your friends do, or a special ability that seems out of place even for a wizard."

Harry shook his head no, though the look in Dumbledore's eyes suggested that he didn't seem to believe him. "Not that I've noticed, Sir," Harry elaborated looking away from the old man for a moment, before looking back up.

Dumbledore searched Harry's eyes and Harry shifted uncomfortably. If the old man was trying to use Legilimency on him, Harry couldn't discern it, but the intense glare in his eyes was unnerving. What was he trying to find, the Dark Lord himself?

"Why did you come to Hogwarts this summer?" Dumbledore suddenly asked.

Harry immediately looked away again from the Headmaster's piercing gaze. "I didn't," he lied.

Dumbledore was silent for a long moment and Harry had a sneaking suspicion that the old wizard was trying to keep his temper in check. "You are lying," Dumbledore said calmly. "I saw you go into Myrtle's bathroom, come back out several hours later, and steal several bottles of Dreamless Sleep Potion as well as a Strengthening Potion from the Hospital Wing and then Apparate from the front gates of the school. Now would you care to tell me the truth?"

"You can't handle the truth," Harry whispered darkly. He meant this in more ways than one. He really only had three options going for him here. He could one; tell Dumbledore and the others the complete truth, which was entirely out of the question. He could two; tell them what they already believed, that he was going to commit suicide. Or three; he could tell them a variation of the truth and hope to Slytherin and Gryffindor that they didn't come to the real truth on their own. He was not ready for anyone but Snape to know about his past, their future. They weren't ready to know, especially as when he died, not one of them was alive.

Dumbledore ran his hand over his face and closed his eyes for a long moment before he looked up at Harry again. "Are you trying to kill yourself?" he asked bluntly.

Harry opened up his mouth to deny that, but stopped himself. "Not anymore," he said instead, and that was the truth and he proved that to himself by looking Dumbledore in the eyes as he said it.

Everyone but Dumbledore gasped around him, even Snape. There had been plenty of times in the past that he had thought about killing himself, even before Hogwarts, before he found out about the Wizarding World, but he had always talked himself out of it with numerous reasons to live. After Ron and Hermione's deaths he had prayed for death while being the Dark Lord's prisoner, and welcomed it with open arms when it finally came, even though it was denied him. But now he had the chance to set everything right. He could give his friends and his family a future; he could give himself a future and that was something to live for.

"Harry I think we need to talk. This is not normal for one your age –" Dumbledore said seriously.

"Normal!" exclaimed Harry, suddenly very angry. "I'm not normal! There's never been anything normal about me! My parents were murdered when I was a baby because of –" Harry stopped. "A prophecy," he spit out furiously. "I've grown up with a family who despises me and I've got a bloody dark wizard who wants to kill me!"

"Harry, look at me." Harry looked back up at Dumbledore. "Death is not the answer, not for one so young," he said gently.

Harry instantly became completely enraged at those words and fire swirled in his eyes. "You're right, but that doesn't stop them from dying does it!" Harry snapped and then he jumped up from the bed and ran. It probably wasn't the smartest decision on his part, but he couldn't sit there and be interrogated anymore. He ran to the one place he knew no one else could follow and he was almost there too, just outside the door in fact when he stopped in his tracks.

Mrs. Norris was sitting in the middle of the hall yowling and not two feet from her was Argus Filch sprawled out on the floor, staring wide-eyed and blankly up at the ceiling. Harry inched around the cat and towards the caretaker cautiously. His breath hitched in his throat as he reached his hand out. The man was...

A scream echoed through the halls and Harry spun around, his wand coming to his hand in a flash. It was Penelope Clearwater and Percy Weasley was with her. He shook his head looking from Harry to Filch and back. "Harry, what did you –?"

Harry suddenly lowered his wand. "No, I didn't do this, Percy, I found him like this –" Harry tried to explain but was cut off when Ron and Hermione yelled his name. The professors came around the corner just after them and Harry cursed as Dumbledore suddenly pointed his wand at him.

"Mr. Potter, drop your wand!" Dumbledore demanded.

Harry shook his head in shock, not releasing his wand. "I didn't do this, I swear Professor; you have to believe me I found him like –" Harry stopped abruptly as he stared at the wall behind the professors with a feeling of foreboding and with wide terrified eyes. His legs gave way and he dropped to the floor, his face white as a sheet as he read the bloody message on the wall, which was to him and him alone.

IN WHAT WAY DID YOU EVER THINK YOU COULD DEFEAT ME?  
YOU MAY HAVE TAKEN MY LIFE ONCE, CHOSEN ONE, BUT I  
TOO AM BACK AND HOGWARTS WILL NEVER AGAIN SEE  
PEACE AS LONG AS YOU LIVE!

Harry looked at the others in the hall as they one by one turned to see what Harry was seeing; they all gasped. "I swear, I swear that I did not do this!" Harry said quietly, but firmly even though he was shaking in terror. The Dark Lord must have gained his body back, and he was in Hogwarts. He had barely defeated him the last time; there was no way he could do it now, not as he was.

Dumbledore looked down at Harry almost coldly. "This is very serious, Harry, the portraits said that they witnessed you – killing Argus Filch."

Harry jumped to his feet. "No! I didn't kill any – I didn't kill Filch, I found him like this I swear! You have to believe me, Professor!"

"I have no choice, if there were no witnesses – and you were found at the scene – Harry Potter you are hereby expelled –"

"NO!" Harry screamed. "No, I swear an oath. On my magic I did not kill Argus Filch!" A force of magic swept around Harry, stronger than that of any oath he had ever sworn, and then settled again leaving the hall eerily calm. Everyone was gaping at him.

Suddenly, Snape, who had knelt down beside Filch spoke up. "He's not dead, Headmaster. He's been Petrified."

"I didn't do it," Mort hissed softly as Harry breathed a sigh of relief, the Dark Lord would have killed Filch if he were in the school. So he must be controlling someone, but who?

--

A/N: The mystery commences.

## Chapter Nine - Poison

Harry sat curled up in one of the chairs in the Gryffindor common room. He was very much deep in thought and his friends kept glancing up at him intermittently with concern in their eyes, though neither had said anything yet. Harry was rather much fed up with his friends and the secret meetings they kept having since the beginning of school. But as he didn't want to lose the only allies besides Snape and Mort that he had left in the school, he kept his mouth shut about it.

It had been nearly two months since Filch had been found Petrified and Harry had found out about the Dark Lord. He had been let off from the Petrifying of Filch when Myrtle had come from her bathroom and said fiercely that it hadn't been Harry, that it was another boy and a snake. Harry and Mort had been looking for both the unidentified boy and the snake since, but with no luck. The first thing Harry had done after being let go was to check to make sure he still had Riddle's Diary, which he did, as well as Rowena's Bracelet, so he was completely baffled as to how the Dark Lord was controlling whoever he was controlling.

It hadn't taken long for Snape to get him alone to find out the whole truth about Harry's encounter with the Dark Lord and Snape seemed just as horrified as Harry. He hadn't asked how Harry was feeling about all of this as it was obviously apparent, though he did seem to go out of his way to be nicer to him, to the amazement of the students and the staff, especially after how horrible he had been the year before to the Boy-Who-Lived.

Harry had hated that title before, but now he was very much disgusted with it, as it brought a whole new meaning with it. It hadn't taken long for the rumor mill of Hogwarts to come up with explanations of why first; Harry had been in the Hospital Wing for nearly a week, and second; Harry had been caught with a Petrified Filch. None of the rumors bode well for Harry socially. People had actually started going out of their way to avoid having even to be in the same corridor with him, it was his original second year all over again and he hadn't even had to reveal that he was a Parseltongue.

The only people who seemed to stick by him were Ron and Hermione and Fred and George, though the four of them showed some uneasiness around him at times which saddened Harry. Because of all of this, his cutting was getting worse and he had taken to putting concealing charms on his arms to hide that fact from himself. He wasn't suicidal, but the pain helped make him forget for a little while. He sadly remembered when flying used to do that.

Harry's scar had been tingling all day and he found himself jumping at the slightest sounds, not to mention that he hadn't really slept in at least three days. Of course it didn't help that it was Halloween the next day and things always seemed to happen to him on that cursed day. Ron's rat had vanished while Harry was still unconscious in the Hospital Wing, which meant the Dark Lord had a loyal servant to help him again and Harry found himself waiting for the day when he gained his body back and came for him.

"Harry," Ron's voice suddenly brought him out of his thoughts and Harry had to stop himself from jumping completely out of the armchair. "We've got Potions in ten minutes. We really should get going."

"Right Potions," Harry muttered as he got to his feet and grabbed his bag from the floor.

"Harry," Hermione called to him before he could get to the portrait hole. Harry turned back around. "Don't forget your essay," Hermione said handing out the rolled up parchment Harry had completed his Potions essay on only twenty minutes prior.

Harry nodded and took the parchment. "Thanks," he muttered.

"Are you all right, Harry? You're not looking so good, Mate," Ron said from beside Hermione and she nodded her head in agreement.

"I'm fine," Harry said with his conditioned response that his friends would one day come to realize meant that he was feeling anything but. Thinking about it now though, he'd been feeling ill since breakfast. Harry shrugged it off to his lack of sleep and nervousness of it soon being Halloween and started to leave the common room again. "Come on, I don't want to be late."

Ron and Hermione both looked at each other in concern before quickly following their friend. The three reached the Potions classroom in record time and just in time for Snape to let everyone into the room. Harry took his regular seat in the front of the classroom and pulled out his essay and Potions book.

Snape waved his wand and all of the essays left the students' desks – some, their hands – and landed on the professor's desk. He then waved his wand again and instructions for a potion appeared on the board.

Harry smirked, Snape had been using more and more magic in his classroom ever since Harry had unblocked the man's magic, and he even seemed to be enjoying himself as he constantly displayed his proficiency. Of course that didn't mean that he didn't try to create havoc in his classroom with simple things, such as what he had just done on the board. Harry raised an eyebrow and then looking around he raised his hand before anyone else had even noticed what Snape had purposefully done to try and screw the more incompetent students over. It was a learning tool Harry could appreciate, now that he had more experience with potions.

"Mr. Potter, you have a question?" Snape asked rather surprised. Whether it was because he had been the one to raise his hand, or because he was the first one, Harry wasn't sure.

"No, Professor, just an observation. You've switched three of the ingredients in the Deflating Draught," Harry said unconcerned. Hermione beside him quickly looked through both her notes and book with intense concentration. Only because he had actually allowed himself over the last month to study the subject in greater depth had he gotten better at the finer points of Potions. Even as a sixth year student he probably wouldn't have caught the mixed up ingredients as he had always followed the directions instead of figuring out the reactions that could be caused and how to counter them. He even started liking the subject some, though it still wasn't his favorite, it came in a close second.

Snape blinked at Harry for a moment before he nodded. "Very good, Mr. Potter, ten points to Gryffindor for pointing that out when no one else did," Snape glared menacingly around the dungeon classroom. "Indeed, I did purposely mix up those ingredients, but I am not going to tell you which ones, think of this as a pop quiz. We'll see who gets their potions correctly brewed by the end of class. Begin."

Harry carefully set out to make his own potion, while most others quickly searched through their notes and potions books. Ron kept trying to get his attention so that he could get Harry to tell him the answer no doubt, but Harry ignored him to concentrate on his own potion, which he was having a more and more difficult time doing as he started to feel feverish. Perhaps he was coming down with something. He really didn't want to go see Madam Pomfrey because of a cold, maybe Snape would give him something after class. He made all if not most of the potions for Madam Pomfrey anyways.

Hermione finally smiled beside him when she at last found the answer in her text. Harry was rather taken by surprise when Hermione held up her text just enough so that Ron behind them could see her point out the page number. Harry was just beginning to wonder if Snape had noticed when he spoke up.

"Miss Granger, Mister Weasley, you are supposed to be working on this individually. Ten points from Gryffindor each. Now may I suggest you get to work, separately," Snape said and then turned to the other side of the room. "Mister Goyle, ten points from Slytherin, do your own work!" The Slytherins grumbled about this and Zabini smacked Goyle on the shoulder for trying to copy his potion.

The rest of the class period went by in near silence, everyone working as best they could on their potions. It was still twenty minutes before the end of class and Harry had only the last ingredient to add. He picked up a vial and was just about to pour the contents in when his hand started shaking. Harry quickly set the vial down and grabbed his right hand with his left, trying to steady it.

"Harry," Hermione whispered. "Harry, are you all right?"



Harry looked down at his shaking palm; the shards of the Philosopher' Stone in his hand were glowing slightly. "I – I don't know," he said truthfully and in a normal tone of voice.

Snape looked up from his desk. "Mr. Potter –" he began but was cut off when Harry suddenly stood up.

Harry hurried to leave the classroom. He was going to be sick. He had just managed to yank the door open when a tremendous amount of pain shot through his abdomen and a rush of heat swept through his veins. He dubbed over clutching his stomach as a whimper left his lips. It would have been a scream had he not had his teeth clenched.

Snape was suddenly by his side. "Harry?" he questioned, but Harry couldn't respond as he collapsed to his knees. "Weasley, go get Madam Pomfrey... NOW!" he snapped when Ron just sat there staring, but he snapped out of it and ran past them out of the classroom and down the hall. Snape waved his wand in an intricate pattern over Harry and counted under his breath as a light blue color rose over Harry and started slowly changing green. "...five... six... seven– shit," Snape hissed under his breath.

Harry knew what the counting meant even as the pain was increasing. The Dark Lord had used poisons on him while he was his prisoner and he had used the same counting spell, past seven meant fatal.

"Granger, in my storage closet you'll find a jar labeled Bezoars, quickly bring one to me," Snape said over his shoulder. Hermione leapt up from her seat and ran into the closet; she came back out not a second later.

"Sir, there aren't any left," she said fearfully.

Snape again cursed under his breath but then turned back to Harry who had started to plead threw gasps of breath as the pain only increased. "Please... Snape p-please..."

Snape seemed to know what Harry was pleading for and shook his head. "No!" he said adamantly. As he waved his wand over Harry again, this time using a different more complex spell. When he was

done he jumped to his feet. “Granger, come here, make sure he doesn’t lay down, make sure he stays awake!” Hermione immediately ran over. The rest of the students just stared in shock, not knowing what to do as their professor disappeared down the corridor.

Suddenly the pain near completely left Harry and he began to feel really tired as his body temperature increased. He closed his eyes and tried to lay down, but Hermione wouldn’t let him. “No, Harry, you have to stay awake!” She said in a shaky voice as she shook him.

Harry opened his eyes and looked up at her in confusion. “Hermione?” he said sluggishly, his tongue felt really heavy.

Ron and Madam Pomfrey came running down the hallway. “What’s happened to him?” Madam Pomfrey demanded.

Hermione shook her head, tears coming to her eyes. “I don’t know. Professor Snape did a spell I didn’t recognize, told me to keep him awake, and ran –”

“Move,” Snape commanded suddenly as he ran back down the corridor and dropped down beside Harry. He turned him onto his back and Harry collapsed into his arms.

“Professor, I’m d-dying,” Harry said weakly.

“Harry, stay with me. I need you to take this potion, it’s going to hurt like hell, but you have to trust me,” Snape said bringing a vial to Harry’s lips. It was an odd mixture of orange and purple that swirled in the vial. Harry recognized it from the one time the Dark Lord had used it on him and his eyes widened as he remembered the long drawn out explanation and then his begging to take it to stop the poison that was literally eating him from the inside out. Harry shook his head, remembering the pain.

“Severus you can’t, that’s meant for –” Madam Pomfrey protested.

“Trust me, he can handle it. Harry, please you have to take this willingly.” Harry looked up into Snape’s onyx eyes and then nodded

as he opened his mouth to allow Snape to pour the potion in. Harry swallowed the contents in one gulp and then they all waited.

Harry's sudden tight grasp onto Snape's arm was the first sign that the potion was working the next was the strangled scream that tried to rip from his throat as the potion ran completely through his system. The pain lasted only a few minutes, but those minutes seemed like hours to Harry as he tried not to close in on himself to allow the potion to work quicker. Finally the pain stopped completely and Harry relaxed and breathed in deeply as his strength slowly returned to him through the aid of the potion.

There was utter silence as Harry lay on the floor in Snape's arms and his breath came back under control. The silence was broken by the sudden appearance of the Headmaster. "What happen?" he asked immediately.

"Harry was poisoned," Snape said bluntly, as he looked up at the headmaster, everyone gasped.

"I think it happened at breakfast. I started feeling ill about then, but I thought I was coming down with something," Harry said quietly as he sat up. Madam Pomfrey started to protest, but Snape helped him and stopped the woman's protests. Harry looked back at the potions master. "Thank you," he said quietly, "and for not giving into my plea." The professor nodded in understanding. Harry had plead for a mercy stroke, the last and only time he had done that was as the Dark Lord's prisoner when he had been branded with the Death Mark.

"Severus, I don't know what you could have been possibly thinking, he didn't even know what he was consenting to take. You could have killed him with that potion!" Pomfrey said sternly, nearly shouted. The silent students all gasped at that.

"If I hadn't given him that potion he would have died!" Snape snapped back harshly and the reality of the situation really sunk in for everyone around them, they had almost witness the death of the Boy-Who-Lived. "And he knew what the potion was or he would not have been able to give his consent."

"Is this true, Harry? Did you know what potion Professor Snape was giving you?" Dumbledore asked.

Harry nodded not looking at Dumbledore. "I read about it, I knew what I was taking."

"How did you read about this?" Dumbledore asked suddenly. "The book that potion is found in isn't even allowed in the restricted section."

"I taught it to him," Snape said standing from the floor and helping Harry up as well. "Harry is remarkably gifted in potions and I've been teaching him things beyond the Hogwarts curriculum for the last few months," he lied steadily as he looked Dumbledore in the eye. Harry forced himself not to allow his jaw to drop as Hermione and Ron both looked at him in amazement.

"Severus we agreed that you would not take an apprentice for fifteen years –" Dumbledore began.

"Which is why I have not," Snape bit back. "But I could not in good conscious allow Mr. Potter's talents to wither. I will not name him my apprentice yet, but I will not stop teaching him as long as he wishes to learn. That is part of the oath I took not only as a Potions Master, but also as a Professor."

Harry had to admire the man, to lie to Dumbledore to his face. Yet, then again it wasn't entirely a lie. Merlin, Snape was good at twisting truths. Harry was rather good at Potions now and had gone beyond the Hogwarts curriculum in research in Salazar's Chamber. He had also been meeting with Snape weekly to help rebuild his Occlumency shields. Harry hadn't yet explained how or why he had a connection to Voldemort that made Harry desperately need Occlumency lessons, but maybe one day he would when he learned to trust again, not only Snape, but himself.

"We will discuss this later, Professor Snape," Dumbledore said evenly as he stared back at the man and then he turned to Harry. "Are you all right?"

Harry nodded. "Yes, Professor, I'm fine," Dumbledore looked at him piercingly and Harry amended his statement. "A bit shaken and I really would like to know who poisoned me."

"We will look into it, I promise you. Just be mindful of what you consume until we locate the culprit." Harry nodded. "You should also go with Madam Pomfrey, to make sure you truly are all right, not many so young could survive that potion." Harry reluctantly nodded again.

"We're coming with you," Ron and Hermione said at the same time, obviously not even considering taking no for an answer. Harry only nodded again and then followed Madam Pomfrey, Dumbledore, Ron, and Hermione out of the Dungeons hearing Snape dismiss the rather shocked class before they turned the corner.

--

A/N: The mystery continues.

## Chapter Ten – The Dueling Club and Basilisks

After the incidents with Filch's Petrification and Harry's near poisoning to death, everything was rather calm at Hogwarts, which only put Harry even more on edge. Halloween even went off without a hitch, though Harry thought it was a fluke as he had been poisoned the day before. Dumbledore had not been able to find anything on the person who had poisoned him, nor had the person who had Petrified Filch been located. But as of yet no one had been Petrified again.

The Gryffindor verses Slytherin game had come and gone, and Harry had made an amazing catch of the Snitch, right out from under Malfoy's nose, literally. It had scared the boy half to death and made even the Slytherins roar with laughter. And the best part was that he had been able to keep all of the bones in his arm.

When Harry had told Snape how glad he was to have his bones during one of his training sessions afterwards, the man had laughed for a good five minutes at Harry's expense after Harry explained why. Harry had gotten his revenge though when Lockhart had come down to the Potions classroom to ask Snape to be his assistant during one of Harry's Occlumency lessons, which was now also part of Harry's training. Not that anyone knew about this, they thought that Harry was still receiving extra potion instruction, which in part he was.

Harry had laughed for a good ten minutes when Lockhart had interrupted their session to pretty much demand Snape help him with the Dueling Club. Harry had laughed until Snape had hexed his mouth shut and then the man had been the one laughing as Harry tried for over twenty minutes to reverse the hex wordlessly, which he did eventually manage, but not before dyeing the man's hair blue, his robes bright yellow, and his skin neon red. Snape was still a bit sore about all that, as he had to attend dinner that way grievously to ask Dumbledore to reverse it all, as Harry had not a clue how he had done it. It was all an accident; really.

It was now the middle of December, just before Christmas Holidays and Harry was standing with his arms crossed over his chest in the back of the Great Hall while Lockhart tried to host his Dueling Club with Professor Snape as his assistant. Harry wouldn't have gone and

hadn't planned on going, but Ron and Hermione had dragged him along before he could escape them.

Apparently Snape was still a bit sore at Harry as Harry was now glaring up at the man, who had just called him up to duel against Malfoy, even though Harry had told Snape not to. Perhaps dying his skin red had been stepping over the line a bit. The entire hall turned to look at Harry as he crept backwards towards the door. Harry stopped, not wanting to look like a coward, which he most certainly wasn't. He just didn't think it was a good idea to duel Malfoy; after all he might hurt the blond brat.

"Mr. Potter, come now boy," Harry flinched unconsciously as Lockhart called to him jovially, "nothing to worry about. It's just a practice duel; perhaps I may even be able to teach you a few things," Lockhart said in that tone he often took around Harry that suggested that he knew nothing. It was the same tone that Snape used to take with Neville until Harry had told him about Neville's later achievements with brewing healing potions for several order members after Madam Pomfrey had been injured. In fact Neville's potions had saved the Medi-Witch's life; unfortunately she had died a few days later in her home from an attack by Death Eaters.

Harry seethed in anger at the thought of Lockhart ever being able to teach him anything and growled deep in his throat, loud enough that several students took a step back from him. "I think I know enough, thank you, Sir," Harry said bitingly.

"What's the matter, Potter, scared?" Malfoy sneered from the dueling platform that had been erected. Harry wished that they had just split them up as they had the last time; it would have been easier to slip out of the hall unnoticed.

Harry took a step forward at Malfoy's taunt. "You wish, Malfoy, but just a warning, I'm not responsible if you get hurt," Harry said scathingly. The students looked back and forth between the two as Harry took out his wand and walked calmly, nearly strutted up to the dueling platform. Malfoy scoffed, though he did have a bit of fear in his eyes. Harry relished in that fear. He'd learned over the years, though he hadn't really realized it until after sixth year, that if his

enemies feared him, then they were more likely to screw up. Or wet themselves and run away as Peter Pettigrew had done when he had tried to stop Harry from getting at his Master. That had been after Harry had made himself more powerful using the magic in Gryffindor's and Slytherin's swords, a lot of good that had done him.

Harry walked up onto the platform and pushed his hair back as if to remind his opponent who he was fighting. Snape raised an eyebrow at Harry's antics, especially as Harry usually never flaunted who he was. Harry didn't like the attention but as he was already being stared at by most of the student body, why the hell not? Besides it made life a bit more interesting to be unpredictable, and Harry prided himself on his unpredictability.

"All right gentleman, get into dueling stance, and I want you to disarm your opponent, remember disarm only, we don't want any accidents here." Lockhart said with a glaring smile as Harry and Draco proceeded to take their positions, bowing only slightly at each other.

"I'll give you an accident," Harry grumbled under his breath while he laughed internally as he planned out how to incapacitate Lockhart for a few hours, if not days. He saw Snape take several steps away with a smug look on his face at hearing Harry.

Harry waited for the count of two before he open fired on Draco with a stream of harmless curses meant to disarm the blond Slytherin. Draco's eyes widened as he sidestepped the barrage of curses quickly, only getting hit by one, as the rest sailed passed him, hitting Lockhart square in the chest. The force of the spells sent the git off the platform to slide along the ground and all the way into the wall, where he slumped unconscious.

"Oops," Harry said, with no remorse in his voice as Snape tried to hide a faint smile and the majority of the girls in the school gasped in shock and the boys sniggered in amusement at the unconscious Defense professor. "One would think he would have been able to put up a shield in time. Not to mention standing in back of Draco like that." Harry turned to Snape innocently. "I'm not going to get in trouble for this, am I professor? After all it's not my fault he wasn't as smart as Draco to move out of the way."



Snape's mouth twisted to an almost smile, but he managed to turn it into a sneer as he said calmly. "No, Mr. Potter, in fact twenty points to Gryffindor for disarming Draco and for that amazing, yet low level, spell work."

Harry was going to remark that he was supposed to be only twelve, but Snape had swept out of the Hall trying to hide his obvious laughter as he levitated Lockhart behind him. Harry was abruptly pulled down from the platform and forced out of the Great Hall by Ron and Hermione. Neither of them said a word to him until they were back in the Gryffindor common room and then Hermione rounded on him.

"You did that on purpose!" Hermione screeched.

"That was bloody brilliant!" Ron said at the same time. "I didn't know someone could say spells so fast." Hermione turned to look at Ron scandalously. "What it was, that git deserved everything he got, not to mention Harry here disarmed Malfoy at the same time. It was amazing, by the way, where did you learn how to do that, because Lockhart's definitely not taught us that."

Harry shrugged. "Professor Snape taught me." Ron and Hermione both blinked at him. "What? You knew I was taking extra lessons with him, you didn't think potions was the only thing I was getting out of the man, did you?"

"No, I mean why would you want to be in Snape's presence any longer then you have to, Mate?" Ron said as he looked at Harry as if he'd gone crazy.

Harry rolled his eyes, but didn't get a chance to comment as Hermione interjected. "Honestly, Ron, Harry's not forced to take the extra lessons and I'd personally give anything to have the opportunity to learn what Harry is learning. It must be absolutely fascinating. I've read a bit up on Professor Snape and he has a mastery in both Potions and Defense Against the Dark Arts. Harry must be learning so much from him."

Harry just nodded and Ron shook his head. "Whatever, Mate, if you want to waste all your time studying like Hermione does, you can go right ahead. I'm going to go find someone to play Exploding Snaps with," Ron huffed as he wandered off further into the common room, which was now mostly filled with students.

Hermione huffed herself and then yelled after Ron. "I don't just study, you know!" She shouted irritably before she disappeared up the girl's staircase. Harry shook his head tiredly before he left for the boy's dorms.

Not too long after and Harry was sound asleep just after his head hit the pillow. No matter what Snape had said about those spells being low level, it had taken a lot out of him to make them one steady stream. He'd honestly like to see Snape try that and not be tired afterwards.

Though Harry was sound asleep and outwardly looked like he was having a peaceful night's rest, he was far from resting comfortably. He was currently reliving every horrible bit of his last three months of life before coming to the past.

That was his dreams before the first time he had woken up, before the second it was worse, he had relived his death and the death of Ginny over and over again. By the third time he was about ready to give up on sleep for the night, and turn to the knife, but remembered that he still had some of the Dreamless Sleep Potion that he had made in his last session with Snape, where he had promised to try and stop cutting himself. He took a half a dose as he still had classes the next morning and he'd already missed quite a few this year.

--

Harry woke up really late the next morning to shouts and talking coming from all the dorms below the second year dorms and into the common room. He turned back over with all intention of going back to sleep, not wanted to even get out of bed after the night he'd had. He assumed Fred and George had set off a prank or something when Seamus and Dean came running into the dorm.

“Harry, Mate, get up, morning classes have been cancelled, and McGonagall’s called us all into the common room,” Dean said drawing back the thick curtains around Harry’s bed.

Harry sat up immediately, completely wide-awake, despite the potion still in his system, it hadn’t worked very well anyways. “What’s happened?” The two just shrugged and shook their heads and then left the room. Harry quickly got out of bed and got dressed before dashing down to the common room just as McGonagall entered through the portrait hole.

“Settle down, everyone, I have an announcement to make,” McGonagall called over the students. Everyone was instantly silent, all wanting to know what was happening. “This morning seven students were found Petrified on the second floor.” Murmurs and whispers sprang up all over as students looked around to see who was missing, before McGonagall continued. “Do not fear they will be well again as soon as Madam Pomfrey can make up a cure for them. However, for your safety while we search the grounds for the culprit to this serious crime you will stay in your common room for the rest of the day. I do not want to see any of you out of bounds. Understood?”

Everyone nodded and then started talking again to one another as McGonagall left. Harry stared after her for a good five minutes before he sprinted up the stairs and retrieved his invisibility cloak and slipped out of the common room unnoticed by the students, but not the teachers. Unbeknownst to him, he had tripped a ward that alerted them if any students left.

Harry quickly made his way down to the second floor and slipped unobserved into the girl’s bathroom. He quickly looked around and put up a silencing charm before opening the Chamber of Secrets and descending cautiously into its depths. It wasn’t that he didn’t trust his friend, but what else was he supposed to believe? He’d put Mortedolv back into the chamber just a few days ago, and de-shank him as the Basilisk was complaining about having to be in Harry’s pocket all the time, because Harry didn’t want anyone to see him.

Harry opened the entrance into Salazar’s Chambers and then walked down the stairs and into the sitting room where he immediately found

Mort curled up in front of the fireplace sleeping. Harry breathed out a sigh of relief. "Hey, Mort," Harry hissed loudly enough to wake the serpent.

The Basilisk blinked open his eyes and then lifted his large head to see Harry. "Harry, what are you doing here, do you not have classes?" Mort asked curiously.

Harry shook his head; he was still trying to figure out how the snake could tell time down here in the depths of the school. "No, they were cancelled. Seven students were found Petrified this morning, the schools being searched. I just wanted to make sure you were all right."

"You wanted to make sure I had not done it," Mort said calmly. Harry looked at his feet and nodded. "I understand. I am the logical choice after all, and we still have not located the one who Petrified the school's caretaker. Do not worry, I am not offended."

"I am sorry, Mort. After my first second year, every time someone set Hogwarts to unrest, I was the first person people turned to. I shouldn't have assumed it was you." Harry said regrettably. "Though I almost wish it was you, then I would know who did it."

"Perhaps there is a way to sniff out who is responsible, obviously they have to have a Basilisk in their control, and as only one other person that we know of can speak the serpent tongue, they also have to be able to control him using other means," Mort suggested.

Harry thought about it for a moment before he looked back up to Mort. "Are you suggesting that we go on a sniff hunt around the school? You are brilliant, Mort!" Harry exclaimed. "Though, I am going to have to shrink you again."

"Not if I use the pipes and you follow my voice," Mortedolv said and Harry nodded.

"Right then, let's get started, I do not want any more people to get Petrified, or worse, killed."

--

Four hours later had Harry still following Mort's voice behind the walls, and still they weren't that much closer to finding out who was behind it all. Though Mort had just hissed that he was definitely on the trail of another Basilisk, which was a good thing, though they had been back and forth down this particular corridor five times now and had found nothing. And Harry didn't think they were going to find anything, as it was the same corridor that the seven students had been found in, so of course it smelled of Basilisk. Harry was getting tired but he was still alert enough to stop when Mort called out to do so.

This was at the same time that Harry heard the staff talking in an office not too far away, the Defense Against the Dark Arts office in fact. Harry crept quietly by as he headed further down the corridor, but stopped before he almost laughed at what he was hearing from Lockhart's office.

"Of course it is Harry Potter, he is after all the only one missing, and he did rather cruelly throw me into a wall yesterday." Lockhart sounded like a wounded puppy.

"He would not have thrown you into a wall if you had simply blocked his spells or moved out of the way, you bumbling incompetent fool. Mr. Potter would not intentionally harm another, you or another student. The disarming spells he used were meant to be a distraction for Mr. Malfoy. He had anticipated Mr. Malfoy jumping out of the way and cast one just off the others, which worked; rather well I might add." Harry could hear the smug smirk in Snape's voice.

"I still think he did it intentionally, he has been nothing more than an attention seeking know-it-all in my class since the first day. He persists in disrupting my class at every opportunity. The Petrification of the students was obviously his plea for attention."

"If anything he has probably been kidnapped, you idiot," Snape sneered very pronouncedly at Lockhart.

"You think so, Severus?" Dumbledore asked.

"It is highly probable," Snape replied.

"Oh, I do hope you are wrong," McGonagall nearly whispered.

"As do I," Snape said quietly.

Harry felt guilty at causing his professor's to worry, but there was really nothing any of them could do at the moment and Harry wasn't about to give up Mort or his secret about being a Parseltongue. It would raise too many questions that he didn't want to answer, so he'd take care of this himself. Harry moved away from the office and towards where Mortedolv was calling him. It wasn't long before Harry found an old hidden passageway that was half collapsed, but looked to be tunneled out. They must have passed in front of it a hundred times it was so obscured.

Harry cautiously walked down the tunnel until he began to hear voices, or rather one voice talking to himself. Harry stopped almost instantly and anger burned through him; he knew that voice. Without so much as a thought, Harry jumped out, pulling back the hood of his invisibility cloak as he did, and aimed his wand, the Cruciatus Curse on the tip of his tongue and wanting to be used.

"Pettigrew!" seethed Harry, fire coming to his eyes and turning them very nearly red. Pettigrew's head shot up and he turned as if to command the small Basilisk asleep beside him to attack, but Harry was quicker. "Wingardium Leviosa, Silencio, Crucio!" Harry felt no remorse at Pettigrew's pain as he watched the sniveling rat wreath in agony in the air before him, but he did at what he was doing and the curse's power weakened then finally died away as Harry lowered his wand to his side, the fire disappearing from his eyes just as quickly as it had come. Pettigrew dropped to the floor as Harry looked at the ground, feeling physically sick at what he had just done.

Pettigrew pulled out his wand and suddenly a hissing sound of 'kill,' sounded though the room and Harry had just enough time to dodge being bitten by the now very much awake Basilisk. "No, stop," Harry hissed as he rolled away again, but the serpent kept coming. Harry ran out of the room and back down the passageway and into the second floor corridor as fast as he could as the Basilisk was right on

his heels. He slammed into the wall and then rolled away as the serpent followed shortly after, leaving a rather large dent in the stone where Harry had just been.

Harry ran full speed back the way he had just come, his cloak flying from his neck behind him. He passed Lockhart's office, where he yelled, "Stay in there!" before running past, followed by the adolescent Basilisk, then Pettigrew, and then right behind him, Mortedolv. The Professors all ran towards the door in shock at what they had just seen and then quickly followed after them, each with their wands drawn.

"Potter, there's no way you can out run my Basilisk!" Pettigrew screamed.

"Neither can you!" Harry yelled back and Peter glanced over his shoulder and then did a wide-eyed double take and sped his running up at what he saw.

Harry made to dodge another swipe at him as he turned a corner, but tripped and skidded across the floor and straight through Moaning Myrtle who screamed. Harry rolled to the side as the serpent struck at the ground where he had just been. "Mort help!" Harry yelled as the Basilisk attempted to strike at him again.

Harry scrambled out of the way from another swipe and then got to his feet about to run again when his legs were swept out from underneath him and he landed very hard on his back and then he was pinned down by the large serpent's tail. The last thing Harry saw was the Basilisk's huge yellow eyes glaring down at him and then everything went black.

--

A/N: I know a cliffy, but the next chapter is coming.

## Chapter Eleven – The Mutt, the Wolf and the Apprenticeship

Harry awoke with a bitter after taste in his mouth and several people standing around him in what was unmistakably the Hospital Wing. He blinked blurrily at the professors around him and then choked out. "I'm not dead."

A brief chuckle came from Dumbledore as he handed Harry his glasses. "No, Mr. Potter, you are not, however you have been Petrified for the last few months."

Harry looked around at the others again, before he asked, "Umm, what happened exactly?"

"Interesting that, you were found in a corridor with Peter Pettigrew, both of you were Petrified and the Basilisks that had done it had left you alive and have not been seen since," McGonagall replied, her eyes full of confusion.

"Basilisks?" asked Harry looking rather perplexed. "P-Pettigrew?" he then asked, then his eyes widened. "Oh!" Harry suddenly exclaimed as he remembered, everything. He was in the past and Pettigrew had a Basilisk, right. Harry frowned as Snape looked at him in confusion and then Harry had an epiphany. "But You-Know-Who told me he was dead, said he'd killed himself after betraying my parents! How can he be alive?" Snape's frown deepened before he caught on to what Harry was trying to accomplish.

Dumbledore looked to the other professors as if expecting the revelation, but not who it came from. "Voldemort," Harry clenched his teeth as pain ran down his spine, but otherwise, tried to hide it. Dumbledore noticed, but didn't comment as he continued, "Told you about Pettigrew? He told you he had betrayed your parents?"

Harry nodded. "He said someone named Black, I assume another of my parent's friends, was supposed to be their Secret Keeper," Harry said this with uncertainty in his voice and Dumbledore nodded. "But, they switched to Pettigrew at the last minute at Black's insistence. Something about not suspecting Pettigrew of being the Secret



Keeper, but it doesn't matter, You-Know-Who said Black was dead," Harry said softly.

"Sirius Black is not dead," Snape said dryly. "He was imprisoned for Pettigrew's murder." Harry could almost hear the 'as you well know,' that Snape obviously wanted to add to the end of that. "Of course, we've known this for quite a while as your friends had told us what you knew at the beginning of the year, and have reminded us every week since," Snape said as he looked up at Dumbledore with a look of 'I told you we should have believed them' on his face. Harry would have smiled at Snape for cleverly, yet rather dryly, reminding Dumbledore that his Godfather was stuck in prison for a crime he never committed. Though, he'd had no idea about his friends speaking to the professors about this. That must have been why they kept disappearing together.

"What? Well obviously he was framed!" Harry exclaimed as his voice cracked from lack of use.

Dumbledore nodded. "Thank you, Harry, for this information, we were about to wake Pettigrew up and get the information from him."

"No!" Harry said and then thought quickly for his response to that as everyone looked at him curiously, even Snape. "I saw him turn from a rat, he's, – he's an Animagus." That of course was true, but he didn't want the Professors to find out that he had cast the Cruciatus Curse on him. Pettigrew may be a coward but he wasn't an idiot, and he'd be sure to take Harry down with him.

"Black wasn't lying," McGonagall exclaimed with astonishment in her voice. "He had really learned how to turn into an Animagus!"

"So Pettigrew's the one who's been Petrifying people?" Harry asked quietly.

"Yes, Harry, but everyone is well again," Dumbledore said. "Though we are curious how you managed to be in that chase with the Basilisks to begin with."

Harry suppressed a smirk. "I was kidnapped." Harry almost laughed when Snape stared at him and then rolled his eyes.

--

Harry and the others who had been Petrified were released from the Hospital Wing just before the feast that night, which was a rather huge affair as everyone welcomed them back and Dumbledore announced that exams had been canceled. Harry learned that the other seven students who had been Petrified were Colin Creevey, Hermione Granger, Penelope Clearwater, Justin Fitch-Fletcher, Ron, Ginny and Percy Weasley.

Apparently Ron, Ginny, and Hermione were trying to find out why Harry liked Moaning Myrtle so much and Colin had tagged along to get pictures of the ghost. At the same time Penelope and Percy were on their way to the Defense office to ask Lockhart a few questions before class. Justin just happened to be using one of the sets of secret passages off the Library to get to the Great Hall in time to have breakfast before class, the passage had dropped him off on the second floor and he'd nearly run into the group of Gryffindors in his hurry. They'd all been arguing about watching where he was going and running in the halls when the two prefects had stopped them from fighting.

Before they could all break up to go their separate ways, Ron had seen the spiders fleeing along the wall and out of a window. They'd all been staring at said window curiously when the Basilisk had come out and they'd seen its reflection. They were all very lucky that they had been looking at the window. The funny thing was, that almost everyone who had been Petrified the first time had been Petrified this time as well; Harry guessed some things just couldn't be changed.

The thing that really stumped Harry, and he still didn't know why, was how he survived. He'd looked directly into the Basilisk's eyes. He shouldn't have survived and Mort had said the same thing. Harry had been researching every chance he got to find out the reason, and he still hadn't come up with an explanation.

Harry suddenly stopped in his tracks as he was following the others down to the end of year feast. Hermione looked back at him and then stopped the other second year Gryffindors, and Ginny and Colin, who had been walking with them. "Harry, what's wrong?" she asked.

Harry was looking out a nearby window with tears in his eyes. The window faced the front gates and two men were walking up from them to the school. Harry took off down the corridor, the others right after him. Harry lost them about halfway to the Entrance Hall, he was running so fast. In fact he was so focused on getting to the Entrance Hall that he didn't notice Snape until he had literally collided with him.

"I'm so sorry, Professor," Harry said as he sprung back to his feet and began to help the rather irate man up off the floor.

"Please tell me you weren't running from another Basilisk, Potter," Snape said as he brushed himself off.

"No, Sirius and Remus are here!" Harry exclaimed.

"Ah, the Mutt and the Wolf," Snape said dryly.

Harry nodded and was about to take off again when he was grabbed by Snape.

"You don't know them, Potter," Snape reminded. Harry instantly deflated. "You cannot just run up to them."

"I know, I just – it's been forever since I've seen either of them..." Harry said quietly.

"I will bring you to them and introduce you," Snape sighed at the despondent and rather pathetic look on Harry's face. He rolled his eyes when Harry beamed.

"Thank you, Professor, but is that such a good idea?" Harry said quizzically. "As I recall you hate each other."

"Loath, loath each other," Snape corrected almost proudly and Harry snorted. "Come on," Snape said as he rolled his eyes again and

cuffed Harry on the back of his head. "I can't believe I'm doing this for you," he commented as they started walking towards the entrance hall.

"Ah, come on, Professor, you know you've become fond of me," Harry teased. In his first second year, Harry would have been too frightened to even really talk to the Professor, but since Snape had started training Harry, they had both become... friends; yes Harry would call it that. Harry respected the man and Snape had come to respect Harry, they'd also both gotten to know each other and Harry even went to Snape to talk on occasion. Harry still kept his own secrets, but Snape had been able to help him with many things including his nightmares and Harry was now able to sleep most nights all the way through without the aid of a Dreamless Sleep potion.

"I can't believe I'm becoming fond of you, Potter," Snape said back and Harry nearly tripped.

"Really?" said Harry once he'd overcome his shock.

"Doesn't mean that I'm not going to laugh if you trip and fall on your face with your gracelessness," Snape scoffed.

"Ah, Professor, I'm touched," Harry said as he put his hand over his heart and pretended to wipe a tear out of his eye.

"You aren't going to hug me or anything are you?" Snape said in obvious disgust.

"Come on, everyone needs a hug every once in a while," Harry joked.

"Not me and not from you, Potter," Snape sneered.

"I'm wounded, Professor," Harry said dramatically.

"You'll get over it, I know I have." Snape barked out a sudden laugh at Harry's mock outraged expression.

Finally they'd reached the Entrance Hall, unnoticed they had left behind a group of shocked Gryffindors at Snape's and Harry's joking with each other. By the time they'd arrived Dumbledore and McGonagall were both in the hall and Sirius and Remus had just entered. It took everything in Harry not to run to the two men, and Snape's hand on his shoulder.

"Sirius, Remus," McGonagall greeted with a smile on her face and tears coming to her eyes.

"Professors," Remus greeted back while Sirius had a kind of lost look in his eyes.

"We are no longer your professors," Dumbledore reminded gently. "Sirius, how are you doing?"

Sirius smiled slightly as he focus on the old man. "Much better, thank you, Professor, Albus," Sirius corrected. "Thank you for inviting us."

"Not a problem dear boy, I am very happy that you accepted the invitation." Dumbledore smiled, his eyes twinkling quite wildly.

"My goodness, is that Harry?" Remus suddenly said as he noticed Harry and Snape standing in the Entrance Hall with them.

Harry smiled as Sirius turned towards him as well as the two professors. Harry didn't move as Snape still had a firm grip on him, though the hand was obviously also for support as he was trembling slightly. The last time he had seen the both of them it had been as they had died; Sirius of course through the veil and Remus a conjured silver arrow through the heart at the final battle.

Snape squeezed his shoulder once before he released him. "Lupin, Black, I would like you to meet Harry Potter."

Harry suddenly found himself with a couple sets of arms wrapped around him. He was so shocked that he just kind of stood there stiffly until the two had let go. "Umm, hi," Harry said eloquently.

"Harry, we were friends of your parents, we went to school with the both of them," Remus explained.

"I know, I have pictures, you were at my parents' wedding," Harry said with a smile on his face. "You must be Remus," Harry said holding out his hand. Remus shook it firmly. Harry turned to Sirius. "And you are Sirius," Harry stated.

"Not all the time," Sirius joked and Harry chuckled. "I don't know if anyone has told you, but I'm also your godfather."

Harry made a show of widening his eyes and shaking his head. "No, no one had told me," Harry made a point of glaring at the two heads of Hogwarts, who both had the grace to look guilty. There was silence for a few minutes until Harry spoke again. "I found a box of pictures in my vault; you were in most of them, though you were quite a bit younger in them. As was Professor Snape," Harry said with a smirk, as he just couldn't help himself.

"You have pictures of me?" Snape said in a horrified voice. "They better not be incriminating," he muttered under his breath.

"Professor, what kind of Gryffindor do you take me for? Of course they're incriminating; not that they're leaving my trunk," Harry added when Snape's eyes widened comically and Sirius and Remus both snorted.

Snape suddenly rounded on Harry. "They are in your trunk? As in the Gryffindor boy's dormitory, as in the dormitory above Fred and George Weasley's dormitory, as in the trunk that has been sitting there for most of the year unattended?" Snape said all in one breath.

Harry shrunk back a bit. "Yeah, t-that would be where they are, Sir." Harry gulped. "B-but, they'll go right back in my vault as soon as I get to Gringotts!" Harry assured.

"That's assuming the Weasley twins haven't already got them and had them confiscated," McGonagall muttered as she tried to keep the smile off her face.

Snape rounded on the older woman. "What?"

"Oh, come now, Severus, no harm no foul. I will return the pictures to Mr. Potter tomorrow morning before he leaves," McGonagall assured.

"No, you'll give them to me," Snape practically demanded.

"Oh, but there are pictures of Mr. Potter's parents in them, I'm sure he'll want them back –"

"No, no," Harry said shaking his head adamantly. "No, by all means, I have plenty, h-he can have them, all of them," Harry insisted. Snape would make his life a living hell in training if those pictures got around. He was also going to skin the twins alive for going through his stuff; that is if Snape didn't get to them first of course. He was just glad that anything incriminating to him was in the Chamber with Mort, including the Horcruxes, or he'd be screwed right about now.

Snape nodded. "There's that Slytherin self preservation I knew you had in you," Snape said dryly.

Harry raised his eyebrows. "I have plenty of self preservation, Sir." Snape just glared at Harry. "It's not my fault trouble seems to follow me wherever I go."

"I'm not going to say a word," Snape said loftily. "Basilisk," Snape said under his breath. Harry's mouth dropped open that Snape had just done that. "Poison," he continued. "Need I continue?"

"Those weren't my fault, Professor," Harry said holding his head high.

The others watched the natural bantering back and forth between Harry and Snape in almost shock. Of course the professors knew the two got along, but not to such an extent, it was almost as if they were father and son and both Dumbledore and McGonagall wondered if the two realized the bond they were forming. Sirius and Remus were just in shock.

Harry took a step back as Snape's face turned slightly red as he tried to suppress laughter. "Oh, yes, very much not your fault at all," Snape

said in an amazingly calm voice, though with a dangerous hint of amusement to it. "You're certainly one to find a reason to stay out of trouble, Harry."

Harry nearly choked as the man said his first name, but recovered quickly. It wasn't the first time, though usually when he said it, Harry was dying. Harry almost looked to make sure he wasn't. "Yes, Professor," Harry answered finally.

Sirius and Remus looked at him funny, obviously expecting some sort of animosity from Snape for Harry's cheek, but Snape wasn't going to give any. Most of the school, though as shocking as it is to them, knew that Harry and Snape actually got along.

"What's the matter, Black, amazed that there's a Potter that doesn't despise me?" Snape said rather scathingly.

"Severus," Dumbledore admonished.

"Albus," Severus said right back.

Harry could almost feel the tension in the hall building and Harry was determined to make it disappear, it was so relaxed a minute ago, what had happened? "Professor Snape," Harry said loudly. "You were going to tell me about the things I should study over the summer before the feast, so that I don't fall behind."

Snape actually chuckled at what Harry was obviously trying to do. "Fall behind, you are already ahead of the seventh years in Potions as well you know," Snape boasted dryly, turning the spotlight on Harry completely. He knew how much Harry hated being in the spotlight, so to speak.

Harry blushed, but before he had a chance to comment, four people exclaimed at the same time, and in the same exact way, "S-seventh years!"

Dumbledore looked the most shocked. "Severus, you never said he was that advanced."



"I did say he was remarkably gifted and he would be my apprentice if you allowed it," Snape said quite seriously.

Dumbledore frowned, "You know I cannot."

"Why not?" asked Harry bluntly, as he turned on Dumbledore. By now a rather large crowd had formed on the stairs over the Entrance Hall. Students, all who were heading for the end of year feast and had gone unnoticed.

"I cannot answer that, Harry," Dumbledore told him firmly.

Harry glanced at Snape momentarily. "It's because of You-Know-Who isn't it, because of the Mark?"

"Who told you that?" Dumbledore questioned immediately.

"He did after he saved my life the last time. Do you really think he'd save my life if he still...?" Harry trailed off as he then took real notice of the students listening. "He's saved my life three times I might add, Professor. In fact, I trust Professor Snape more than I trust anyone else here, including you. I want to be his apprentice and I'm honored that he's chosen me." Harry said calmly, yet passionately.

Dumbledore took in a deep breath and looked at Snape beside Harry with contemplation in his eyes. It was almost as if the entire hall was holding its breath while Dumbledore continued to stare at Snape. There hadn't been an apprentice in Hogwarts for over fifty years. Minutes went by before Dumbledore finally looked away.

"Very well," Dumbledore sighed though there was no twinkle in his eyes. "Professor Snape if it is your desire to have Mr. Potter as your apprentice then I will allow it, after his third year." Snape nodded immediately and Harry smiled.

"That means I'll be able to learn Defense Against the Dark Arts from him too, right?" Harry asked.

Dumbledore looked at Harry and sighed. "Yes, Harry, when you are fourteen," he said glancing again at Snape.

Hermione suddenly ran up to Harry as if coming out of nowhere. "Harry, do you know how lucky you are?" she exclaimed loudly. "You're going to be learning both Potions and Defense Against the Dark Arts from a Master!"

There was an awed intake of breath from most of the student population. They'd all known Snape was a potions professor, but to hold a mastery in two subjects was very rare, almost unheard of, and at such a young age.

Both Sirius and Remus had their mouths hanging open. Whether it was from the fact that Snape held two masteries or the fact that Harry wanted to be his apprentice, Harry wasn't sure, though it had him laughing.

--

A/N: Here ends year two, next chapter picks up at the beginning of year three. What did you all think of my Chamber of Secrets?

## Chapter Twelve – The Dementors of Privet Drive

Harry sat in his bedroom in Privet Drive with Verdammt und die Dunkelheit propped up on his knees. It was nearing the time when Aunt Marge would be leaving with Uncle Vernon. Surprising even Harry himself, the visit with Aunt Marge had actually been... well surprising.

Harry, to try and keep the peace at the Dursley residence for the summer had buttered up his aunt so much that she had yelled at Vernon for treating him like a slave. Things in the Dursley residence had remarkably and rapidly changed after that for Harry. He could almost now call them real family. Who knew that Vernon Dursley was afraid of his sister?

It was quite extraordinary really, after that first day Harry got along with Aunt Marge rather well. From what he had ever seen of her in his youth, to him she had always been just like Vernon, but she really wasn't all that bad, once Harry got to know her. He still disliked her dog; though he got the impression the feeling was mutual on the dog's behalf. He even found out that she knew about magic, but didn't think it was safe because of people she knew who had died in the last war, not Muggles like herself, but wizards! Vernon was rather shocked by this news as well, and had literally gone into a catatonic state for two hours.

His experience with Aunt Marge was so different that Harry was tempted to make sure the women wasn't under some sort of Imperious Curse. But all her actions suggested she wasn't. It was rather perplexing for Harry, but the apology he had received from Uncle Vernon, Aunt Petunia, and Dudley was well worth his perplexity. And to think all he had to do was be nice to the women.

Harry lowered his book with a sigh. It was slow going trying to understand not only the language, but also the complexities of the spells in the large Dark Arts book. It was well beyond anything he had ever studied. It must have taken Tom Riddle years to get to the level he was to be able to cast some of the spells with such ease. If the man wasn't such a bloody lunatic, he'd almost respect him for his knowledge. Harry had thought about sharing the book with Snape,

but had decided against it. It was a very dark book that had even Harry questioning his sanity for reading, even if he was fascinated by the material.

Harry had been so determined this summer to find a counter curse to the curse scar on his neck that he hadn't even noticed his birthday had come and gone until long after it had happened, and he hadn't received any presents. The first thing he had done was call Dobby and ask him about it, but the House Elf was just as baffled as Harry. That had been when Harry had realized that there had been no owls at all, not even his Hogwarts letter. The only exception was Hedwig, who Harry had sent to Hermione right before Aunt Marge had arrived. It actually wasn't until two days after his aunt had come that Harry had even noticed anything was amiss. Ron hadn't even tried to call him on the phone or anything.

Harry heard through his door the family gathering to say farewell to Aunt Marge and put aside his book to join them. He walked down the stairs slowly. He was rather depressed that he hadn't had any owls and had been the last couple of days, it hadn't helped that he still wasn't any closer to finding the curse, let alone the counter curse to his scar.

Aunt Marge must have noticed his down mood because she calmly asked what was bothering him. "What's been bothering you, Harry, you've been like this for days," she commented.

Petunia, Vernon, and Dudley looked at Harry, obviously just noticing. "I-It's nothing, I just haven't received any communications from my friends all summer, not even on my birthday, I should have at least received my Hogwarts letter," Harry said as a frown flitted across his face, he'd never not received his Hogwarts letter.

Aunt Marge looked rather concerned. "I'm sure there is an explanation. Perhaps they're just late in coming."

Harry smiled slightly. "I'm sure you're right, Aunt Marge."

Uncle Vernon looked between the two for a few moments before he finally spoke. "We should really be going Marge, don't want to miss your train."

"Yes, of course," she said and with a flourish of goodbyes and promises to write, and with a pointed look at Harry, she was gone. Harry watched from the doorway of Number Four as Uncle Vernon's car disappeared. Harry was about to turn to go back inside when he decided a walk would do to lift his spirits a bit, it was a beautiful evening after all.

Harry called back inside briefly. "Aunt Petunia, I'm going for a walk."

"All right, do be back in time for dinner, Harry." Harry was actually surprised when he got an acknowledgment as he had been expecting his relatives to go back to their usual selves with him once Aunt Marge was gone.

"I will, Aunt Petunia," Harry answered back before leaving the house.

Harry walked a pretty far ways, all the way to the playground and beyond. The streets were deserted as it was late afternoon, nearly dinnertime. Harry, after a long while walked back to the playground and sat on the swings and looked up at the nearly cloudless sky, hoping to spot an owl, any owl, but there was none, not even a single bird. Harry let out a long sigh and looked down and was surprised to see his cousin walking towards him.

"Is it true you haven't received anything from your friends?" Dudley asked as he sat down next to Harry on one of the swings. Harry only nodded, expecting Dudley to go in on him about it. "That's too bad."

Harry looked at Dudley as he remained silent for a few moments after that. That was it, no mocking, nothing? Harry shrugged in response, not knowing what to say. Harry looked up as the cloudless sky suddenly became filled with heavy dark clouds as a storm rolled in. "We should get back, looks like a storm's coming in."

Dudley nodded and stood. Harry followed and the two began the long walk back to Privet Drive. It wasn't long before it started to rain and

the two found themselves running back home. They were about two blocks from Privet Drive when a car zoomed past and then slowed to a stop and drove backwards to them. It was Uncle Vernon.

“Get in the car, boys, it’s absolutely raining buckets, what are you doing outside anyways?”

Harry and Dudley climbed into the back seat. They were both soaked and shivering and had water dripping from their hair. “W-we were out for a walk, Dad, the storm just came out of no w-where. It was strange,” Dudley said through chattering teeth as Uncle Vernon put the car back in gear and started again for Privet Drive.

“It is awfully strange,” Vernon agreed as he glanced at Harry in the review mirror.

Harry opened his mouth to argue that it wasn’t him when he looked forward and in the middle of the road was a person. “Uncle Vernon, look out,” Harry shouted and Vernon slammed on his brakes and swerved out of the way of Mrs. Figg, who had been standing in the middle of the street, looking to the sky, umbrella in hand and not even noticing the car speeding towards her. The car grazed a lamp pole before screeching to a halt.

Uncle Vernon jumped out of the car to see both the damage to his new car and if Mrs. Figg was all right. “Stay in the car, boys.”

Harry had every intension of doing as his uncle said but then he felt something he hadn’t felt in Little Whinging since he was fifteen and he jumped out of the car. “Stay in the car, Dudley,” Harry said urgently as he pulled out his wand. The Patronus Charm on the tip of his tongue.

“Potter, I said stay in the car!” Vernon nearly bellowed.

“But, Uncle Vernon...” Harry trailed off as the cold seemed to pervade all of his senses and memories bubbled to the surface.

“What are you doing, boy?” Uncle Vernon shouted, but Harry barely heard him as screams echoed through his mind, they weren’t just his mothers, but his friends and his own.

Harry’s wand dropped from his fingers and he fell to his knees as darkness seeped into his vision. That was when he saw the first Dementor standing directly above him. “No,” Harry whispered weakly as a gnarled boney hand grasped him around his neck and lifted him.

“Harry!” his name was shouted by someone, but Harry barely registered it as he felt not only his happiness being sucked away but his soul.

“Expecto Patronum!” Someone shouted and a bright white light invaded his senses and Harry felt himself drop to the ground.

Harry lifted his head, as everything came rushing back to him, to see the wispy Patronus being quickly over powered and Sirius Black stagger back. There were too many Dementors, at least ten! Harry felt his wand by his hand and seeing his godfather there gave him a new strength. Harry lifted his wand as he shot up to his feet. “EXPECTO PETRONUM!” Harry shouted and Prongs, the stag form of his father, shot out of his wand, lighting up the whole area more brightly than he’d ever shone before. Prongs leapt with super speed towards the Dementors driving one by one, all of them away.

Harry dropped to his knees just as the cold was swept away and Prongs disappeared and Sirius was at his side in seconds. “Harry, are you all right?”

Harry nodded, though he was breathing heavily. “I’m fine,” Harry said taking in a deep breath to calm his racing heart. That was when he saw his Uncle lying on the street shivering. “Uncle Vernon!” Harry got back to his feet and ran over to the man.

Vernon looked up to his nephew. “I don’t know what that was, but you saved my life, boy,” he said shakily. Harry just stared back at Vernon, not knowing what to say.

“Here,” Remus Lupin said as he walked over to Uncle Vernon and Harry and handed them each a piece of chocolate. “Eat it, it’ll help, really.”

“Dad, Harry,” Dudley called as he ran over to them from the car he had stayed in. “That was really, scary, what just happened?”

Dudley was handed a piece of chocolate as well and he ate it without question, as Sirius explained grimly. “Those were the Dementors of Azkaban.”

“Dementors of what?” asked Uncle Vernon as he got back to his feet, the shakiness slowly leaving his limbs.

“Dementors of Azkaban Prison,” Harry said quietly. “The WIZARDING Prison, but what were they doing in Little Whinging?” Harry asked, but then shook his head. “Forget I asked that, of course they were after me, but who sent them?”

“I would like to know that as well,” Dumbledore said as he helped Mrs. Figg over to the group.

“Dumbledore,” Harry said. “Not that I’m not grateful, but what are you all doing here?” he suddenly asked.

“We were actually coming here to collect you, Harry,” Sirius explained. “You haven’t been answering your owls.”

“My owls, but I haven’t received any!” Harry exclaimed.

“Not a one?” asked Remus.

Harry shook his head. “No, not even my Hogwarts letter; you don’t think some ones intercepting my mail?”

Everyone looked at Dumbledore. The old wizard looked just as perplexed. “We will look into it.”

--



Half an hour later found Harry and Sirius, packing Harry's belongings up. "So where are we going?" Harry asked though he already thought he knew the answer.

"We are going to my family home in London," Sirius said as he picked up a couple of schoolbooks from Harry's desk and placed them into Harry's trunk.

So they were going to Grimmauld place. Harry wondered if Dumbledore had decided to bring back the Order of the Phoenix early. It would make sense as the Dark Lord was back, in more ways than one, even if he hadn't gotten his body back yet. Harry dropped down to collect his things from the loose floorboards when Sirius picked up something from Harry's bed.

"Verdammt und die Dunkelheit?" Sirius said fluently, like he'd been speaking the language for years. "Harry, where did you get this book?" Sirius practically demanded.

Harry was so shocked when Sirius had spoken the title that he had hit his head on the bed when he had lifted his head, and he came up rubbing the back of his head as he looked at Sirius uncertainly. "Umm..."

"Harry, this is a very dangerous book, a Dark Arts book, where did you get it?" Sirius did demand this time.

"I-I-I don't know. I-I've never seen it before in my life," Harry stuttered out, though even a complete idiot would be able to tell that Harry was lying as there was book marks and even notes in the margins in his handwriting.

Sirius looked down at his godson seriously. "You are lying to me."

"No! Really, I don't – I have no idea where it came from," Harry tried to keep his face neutral as he bit the inside of his lip. Merlin he hoped Sirius believed him, he didn't know how else he was going to explain it.

“Finish packing your things,” Sirius said with disappointment in his voice and eyes as he turned and left the room with the book.

“Damn,” Harry cursed as he threw the stuff from under his floorboards into his trunk and sat down heavily on his bed with his head in his hands. He knew he shouldn’t have left the book lying around like that, but he hadn’t expected Sirius, Remus, and Dumbledore to show up at his house either. Harry heard footsteps on the stairs and quickly finished throwing his belongings into his trunk just as the door opened and Dumbledore came into the room, the book in his arms.

“Sir, really I can explain –”

“Sit down, Harry,” Dumbledore said firmly, Harry sat on his bed immediately. “Harry, I didn’t question you about your scars, I discontinued my questioning about you being at Hogwarts last summer, and I haven’t even bothered to ask you how you knew how to cast the Patronus Charm, but this,” Dumbledore held up the Dark Arts book. “Where did you get this?”

Harry took in a deep breath and looked at his hands. “Knockturn Alley,” he said quietly. “Vol –” Harry hissed as pain shot from his scar. “You-Know-Who cursed me so I can’t say his name, the counter curse is somewhere in that book,” Harry said still looking at his hands. He of course failed to mention when this happened.

“He did this to you when you went after the stone?” Dumbledore questioned. Harry simply nodded, still not looking up. “Why didn’t you come to me? Why didn’t you tell me when I asked?” he asked gently.

Harry shook his head. “I don’t know, I guess I was scared,” Harry lied.

Dumbledore took a deep breath in, obviously detecting the lie, but he let it slide. “Well, if the counter curse is in here, we shall find it, together,” Dumbledore said as he squeezed Harry’s shoulder comfortingly and then stood, with the book still in his hands. “Come, we should go, I still have to figure out who sent those Dementors after you and who’s been intercepting your mail.”

--

Grimmauld Place hadn't changed, though when they had arrived by Portkey, Harry had to pretend that he couldn't see the building until after he was handed the piece of paper with the location written on it. Harry guessed that because he knew the location in the past – future – whatever, he still knew where the location was.

"It's not much to look at, but it's secure and hopefully we'll be able to clean the place up once the Weasley's arrive home from their vacation," Sirius said cheerfully, though his voice was low. "Just be careful to keep your voice down when in the entrance hallway, don't want to disturb dear old mum," Sirius said as he nodded at the curtained off portrait of Mrs. Black and led Harry to the stairs.

Harry followed looking at the dead heads of the House Elves on the walls, thinking that Dobby could probably get most of the stuff off the walls in no time, Sticking Charms or not, the little elf was quite powerful after all.

Seeming to sense some of what Harry was thinking Sirius spoke over his shoulder. "I would have had most of this horrible stuff off the walls, except for the Permanent Sticking Charms on everything. I've tried several times to counter them, but I've not accomplished much."

"Could my House Elf help?" Harry asked; he might as well give Dobby something useful to do as he was paying him and all.

"House Elf? Right, I remember reading the papers. 'Potter Liberates House Elf From Malfoy'! Exactly how did you come about doing that anyways?"

"I'm not quite sure actually. But Dobby went out of his way to keep Malfoy from cursing me so I offered him employment; I only thought it was fair. Where else was he going to go after all," Harry said as he shrugged his shoulders a smirk on his face. He was still pleased with himself about the whole thing.

"If you ask me, the Malfoy's deserved it. Did you know that my cousin Narcissa is Lucius Malfoy's wife? She's just about as vain and arrogant as he is." Harry hesitated before shaking his head, luckily

Sirius had his back turned to Harry and didn't notice. "Ah, here we are, it's not much but it will do, I even cleaned it up for you a bit," Sirius said as he let Harry into his room. It was the same one he shared with Ron in his fifth year. "Ronald Weasley will be sharing with you when they arrive, but I'm sure you won't have a problem with that as he is your dorm mate and friend, at least that is what I have gathered from Dumbledore."

Harry nodded. "It's not a problem."

"Well I'll leave you to get settled. Professor Dumbledore said he wishes to see you after dinner which will be ready hopefully in about ten minutes," Sirius said as he laughed slightly and left Harry to his own.

Harry sat down on his bed with a sigh. "Good old Grimmauld Place," he whispered to himself.

Harry didn't bother to unpack as he made his way down to the kitchen. On his way he ran into a mumbling Kreacher. Harry's eyes flashed with fire and before he could stop himself or knew what he was doing he had grabbed Kreacher around his shoulder, stopping him. "Kreacher!" seethed Harry angrily.

"What does filthy half blood want with Kreacher?" the elf muttered.

"I want you to die a very painful death!" Harry let go of the filthy House Elf, pushing him away as he heard footsteps on the stairs and reigned in his anger slightly. "And one day I will make sure you do!" Harry said darkly and let the wide-eyed elf scurry away rather quickly. Harry shook off the rest of his anger at the elf and continued downstairs and into the kitchen as if he hadn't confronted the traitorous elf at all.

That wasn't to say that it wasn't still effecting him. Throughout the meal, every time he saw Kreacher, it took considerable control for Harry to not leap up and strangle the House Elf. Harry didn't normally hold violent tendencies towards magical creatures, but the elf had betrayed Sirius and it had lead to his death. Harry just had to keep reminding himself that it hadn't happened yet.

After dinner, Harry sat in the parlor with Dumbledore as the old wizard carefully flipped through the Dark Arts book he had confiscated from Harry earlier in the day. Harry kept looking apprehensively at it and Dumbledore. "You've read through most of this?" the elder wizard asked a frown on his face.

Harry hesitated and then nodded as it was obvious by his notes. "Yes, Sir, but I don't understand half of what I read," he answered somewhat truthfully, a lot of it was very confusing.

"How do you know that the counter curse is in here," Dumbledore asked as he closed the book.

Harry looked up at the Headmaster, damn, what was he going to say? "Umm... H-he told me," Harry said quietly as he looked at the floor.

"Lord Vol –"

Harry seethed as a slight pain started to run down his spine. "Please don't say his name."

"I apologize, Harry. He told you where to find the counter curse?" Dumbledore questioned, worry clear in his eyes.

Harry nodded. "I suppose he thought that I'd get a taste for the Dark Arts while I was researching the counter curse. But honestly I have no interest in them at all, Professor. Most of the things in there make me queasy just thinking about them." Harry looked up to the Headmaster's eyes as he said the last bit; after all it was complete truth. He did get queasy just thinking about some of the things that had been cast on him that had come out of that book.

"And that, my boy, is one of the ways that you are different from the Dark Lord," Dumbledore said wisely. Harry didn't contradict him.

--

The day the Weasley's arrived at Grimmauld Place was the day pure chaos arrived as well. Harry thought it was great. The Order of the Phoenix had been reinstated early and currently Ron, Ginny, Fred, George, and even new Head Boy, Percy, were all trying to eavesdrop on the last meeting before school started again.

Harry on the other hand was sitting on the stairs with Hermione, patiently waiting for the meeting to be over with and for his spy to report to him. It was the last night at Grimmauld Place before school and while the younger Weasley's were unsuccessfully trying to infiltrate the Order meeting all night long, Harry and Hermione had made sure their belongings were all packed away and Harry had sent in his little spy to do the dirty work for him.

Harry was quite smug with his idea; the others couldn't fathom why he had no interest in the meetings the Order held. Only Hermione knew the real reason. A small pop alerted them that the meeting was over, and Harry and Hermione shared a brief smirk before calmly ascended the stairs back to Harry and Ron's room and listened while the others were all scolded by Mrs. Weasley, for eavesdropping, when they had been discovered.

Harry chuckled to himself as Dobby handed over the new listening globe he had purchased in Diagon Alley when they had made a run for their school supplies earlier in the day and picked up Hermione and her new cat Crookshanks while they were there. "Thank you, Dobby, anything of real importance that I should listen to now, or can it wait till I'm at school?" Harry asked.

"Dobby's not sure, Harry Potter, sir, but they may have found a cure for your scar," Dobby said quietly as to not be heard if anyone was listening outside the door.

"Really? That's excellent!" Hermione exclaimed; that was when his bedroom door opened and Snape's imposing figure came through with his arms crossed over his chest. He took in first the House Elf and then the listening globe in Harry's hand, and then Hermione's guilty expression.

“So that’s how you’ve been listening in,” Snape sneered, glancing down at the elf with amusement clear in his eyes. Harry smiled sheepishly. “Clever, Potter, very clever. The Headmaster wishes to see you, but I’m sure you already know why,” Snape said knowingly. “Oh and Miss Granger, you should work on keeping your expressions neutral, had I known nothing you alone would have given everything away.” Snape said neutrally without any scorn or contempt in his voice. Hermione still blushed and nodded at the Professor’s advice as Snape turned to leave.

“Good work, Dobby,” Harry said smugly as he pat the elf on the shoulder and hid the globe in his pocket as he followed Snape from the room.

The Weasley kids were all looking guilty and a bit queasy when Harry passed them with a smug smile still on his face. Harry just shook his head in amusement. He did tell them that they shouldn’t eavesdrop and that they’d learn so much more if they didn’t. Only Hermione had listened and questioned him ruthlessly about it.

Harry noted that most of the Order members had gone by the time he got down stairs, though a few lingered. Mister and Mrs. Weasley, Sirius, Remus, and Alastor Moody were all still there, as of course was Professors Dumbledore and Snape.

“Take a seat, Harry,” Dumbledore said pleasantly as he motioned to a chair at the kitchen table.

Harry did as instructed and then waited while the door was closed and silencing wards put back in place. His friends already knew about his new curse scar, so it made him a bit nervous that they had put the silencing wards back up.

Professor Dumbledore pulled out *Verdammt und die Dunkelheit* and opened it to a book-marked page and slid it across the table to Harry. Harry looked in confusion at the English written page until he realized that it wasn’t in English at all, but in Parseltongue. Harry glanced over it for a second until he remembered that they didn’t know he was a Parseltongue yet and lifted his gaze.

Harry shook his head as if in confusion. "What is it?" he asked.

Dumbledore and the others seemed to sag in immense relief. "It's Parseltongue, Harry, the only one who can translate that is the Dark Lord," Dumbledore said gravely.

"That's the cure isn't it?" Of course Harry already knew it was, but he wanted to keep his secret about being a Parseltongue a while longer, even if it meant he had to live with the curse scar. He wished he could just take the book and rid himself of the scar, but Dumbledore hadn't left him alone with it since it had been discovered in Harry's possession. The only way he'd get the book back now was if he stole it, and he may just have to do that.

Dumbledore nodded. "I am sorry, my boy."

Harry shook his head. "I'll just have to live with it, for now," he mumbled the last two words to himself, a plan already forming in his mind, of course it all hinged on if Snape would help him.

--

A/N: Onwards to Hogwarts.



## Chapter Thirteen – To Counter Curses

Harry and Hermione hurried into the Great Hall just as the sorting was being finished by Professor Flitwick. Both had identical grins on their faces that no one could identify the cause for. Ron looked at the duo skeptically, but didn't have time to question where they had been as Dumbledore had stood up to give his speech.

"Welcome!" Dumbledore said jovially. "Welcome to another year at Hogwarts. I have a couple of announcements to be made before I allow you all to partake in this excellent feast. First I am pleased to welcome three new teachers here to Hogwarts."

Scattered whispers went up and down the house tables. Even Harry looked perplexed; three new teachers? Of course he already knew about Remus and Hagrid, but who was the third?

"First, Professor Lupin, who has kindly consented to fill the post of Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher for Professor Lockhart, who I'm sure most of you remember I dismissed last year for his incompetence." Scattered applause and laughter met that announcement. Harry and the Weasley twins clapped loudly and cheered to make up for the lack of applause, but really they were applauding the fact that they'd got Lockhart fired. Technically the twins had done most of the work as Harry had been petrified for most of the year, but it had been his plan to begin with.

"Second, I am pleased to welcome, Professor Black, who will be co-teaching the upper Defense Against the Dark Arts classes as well as teaching an old class that has not been taught here at Hogwarts for many years. The Dueling class will be open for third years and above and the sign-up sheets will be posted in your dormitories this evening and will be added to your schedules tomorrow. Your Heads of House will be available this evening if you have any questions."

"Look at Snape!" Ron hissed beside Harry as he clapped for Sirius.

Harry looked up to the man as he too clapped enthusiastically for Sirius. The man did not look happy about the appointment of his two childhood rivals. Harry shook his head. Somehow he was going to get

the three to be at least civil with each other. But he had a feeling that it was a war unfortunately lost a long time ago.

“As to our third new appointment,” Dumbledore continued as the polite applause for Sirius died down. “Well, I am sorry to tell you that Professor Kettleburn, our Care of Magical Creatures teacher, retired at the end of last year in order to enjoy more time with his remaining limbs. However, I am delighted to say that his place will be filled by none other than Rubeus Hagrid, who has agreed to take on this teaching job in addition to his game-keeping duties.”

The applause was rather thunderous at the Gryffindor table, in particular. And Harry couldn't help grin when Ron and Hermione looked at him as if he were a seer. He'd let slip about Hagrid when Harry had finally gotten all of his mail from the summer, including his presents just a few hours after the Weasley's had arrived at Grimmauld Place. He just happened to mention off hand that only Hagrid would assign a biting book. When they had gone to Diagon Alley, Harry had taken pity on the bookstore clerk and told him how to subdue the books. The poor man had hugged him and began crying.

By the time the applause had stopped, Harry, Ron, and Hermione being the last, Hagrid had tears in his eyes and Sirius was grumbling something in Remus' ear. Probably wondering why they didn't get such applause.

“Well, I think for now that is everything of importance,” said Dumbledore. “Let the feast begin!”

Harry was more than happy to enjoy the feast; after all he needed the energy for tonight, as he doubted he'd be getting much sleep.

--

That night in Gryffindor Tower the line to sign up for the new Dueling class had everyone third year and above in it. Harry, Ron, and Hermione chose to stay off to the side until everyone was done signing up.

"We're going to be really busy this year," Harry said quietly to Hermione. Hermione nodded in agreement looking uncertain as to whether or not she should add the extra class. "Sirius will be awfully disappointed if I don't sign up," Harry said more to himself.

"Yes, but you already have your extra lessons with Professor Snape. You'll be ahead of all of us anyways," Hermione reminded. "I'm sure he'll understand."

"True, but technically I'm not supposed to be learning what I'm learning from him until I'm fourteen. If I use that excuse I might get Professor Snape in trouble with Dumbledore."

"Well, while the two of you decide, I've got more than enough room in my schedule," Ron said as he bounded over to sign up for the class.

"I'll sign up, and if it gets too much for me, I'll just drop the class. After all I'm not taking Divination, so that's one less class to worry about," Harry reasoned.

"And you don't have Muggle studies," Hermione said as she nodded in agreement and the two went up to put their names on the third year signup sheet. "I hope this is a good idea," Hermione said quietly to Harry as she signed her name and handed the quill over to Harry.

Harry hesitated. Did he really have time for this class? Harry nodded to himself, yes of course he did. Harry signed his name on the sheet and stepped back. He really hoped he didn't regret this.

"Well, I'm off to bed. Night Ron, Harry," Hermione said and disappeared up to the girls' dorms.

"We best get some sleep," Ron said as he pat Harry on the back and headed up to the boy's dorms, Harry followed silently, looking over his shoulder at the Dueling class signup sheet as he did.

It didn't take long for the dorms to become silent as everyone drifted off to sleep. Harry waited just long enough to know that his dorm mates were all asleep before he grabbed his invisibility cloak and headed out of the dorms and out of Gryffindor Tower. He walked

silently with his cloak concealing him, all the way to the second floor girls' bathroom. He slowly opened the door and stepped in, only to stop when the glowing tip of a wand was poised in front of his face.

Harry slowly removed his cloak and let the door close behind him. "Evening, Professor," Harry said as he walked over to the sink that concealed the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets.

"Evening, Potter," Snape said as he put his wand away.

"Did you get it?" Harry asked over his shoulder and then looked at the snake engraved on the tap. "Open," he hissed. As Harry had cast a permanent silencing ward over the sink, the opening to the chamber slid open silently.

"Indeed," Snape said as he looked down the pipe with interest. "It was difficult, but I managed it. It will have to be returned before morning though, or we will arise his suspicions."

Harry motioned to the stairs and started his decent with Snape following. "Hopefully it won't take that long," Harry said and then led the way through the rest of the Chamber of Secrets and down into the Chamber of Salazar proper.

Harry chuckled as Snape was rather startled when Mort appeared into the sitting room. "Harry," he hissed. "It is good to see you."

"It is good to see you too, Mort. This is Professor Snape, he knows... everything," Harry pointed to Snape who was trying not to look too uncertain. "Professor Snape, this is Mortedolv," Harry introduced and then held out his hand for Verdammt und die Dunkelheit. "We've found a cure, finally, it's in Parseltongue."

"You are going to performer the counter curse here?" Mortedolv asked.

"Yes, I've brought Professor Snape just in case something goes wrong. It's rather complex and – and painful. I haven't told him this yet as I haven't had more than a glance at it. But what I saw was less then pleasant."

"I suggest you read over this counter curse more before you attempt to use it," Mort advised.

"I plan to; I need to go over everything with Professor Snape. If something goes wrong he needs to know what to do."

"Then I will leave you to it, be careful, Harry," Mort hissed and then left for the other room.

Harry stared after him for a moment and then turned back to Snape. "We've got a lot of work to do before morning."

--

Harry sat cross-legged on the stone floor in the Chamber of Secrets. It was a few hours later and he was more than certain that he could perform the counter curse. Whether he could perform it correctly was an entirely different matter. Mort was sitting beside an uncomfortable looking Snape a few feet away. Snape kept glancing uneasily at the over grown effigy of Salazar Slytherin; after finding out from Mort, through Harry, that the second Basilisk from the previous year was asleep behind the statue, he was even more nervous about being in the chamber, even if he was fascinated at the same time.

"Are you sure you can do this, Harry?" Snape asked for the fifteenth time.

"Yes, Professor, I'm sure I can do this. If I can unblock your magic I can rid myself of this curse," Harry's words were more to reassure himself as he poised his wand over his right hand and made a quick slashing movement with it, he'd gotten rather good at casting spells with his left hand.

Harry winced as three cuts formed in the middle of his palm and blood welled up in his hand. The shards in his hand glowed dimly beneath his skin. "Interesting," Harry muttered to himself before he ran his blood over his wand and then gripped his wand with his right hand. He touched the curse scar with the tip of the bloodied wand.

Harry hissed in pain at the contact but pushed passed it as he gripped his wand tighter and blood flowed more freely from his hand down his arm to be soaked into his sleeve. Harry began a long chant in Parseltongue that he had forced himself to memorize. Luckily to him, Parseltongue looked and sounded like English so all he had to do was remember to stay saying it in the language.

By the time Harry was finished hissing the counter curse his breaths were coming in short gasps. As soon as the last string of the spell was past his lips a bright flash of green magic exploded from his wand. Harry couldn't help the brief scream that escaped him as he dropped his wand and clasped his hand over the back of his neck. Harry, after catching his breath, ran his hand over where the mark was. The scar was still there, but the pain was gone.

"It worked," Harry whispered. Snape was at his side less than a second afterwards and healing the palm of Harry's hand.

"How do you feel?" Snape asked as soon as the cuts were healed.

"A little tired, but other than that, great," Harry said happily if not a bit tiredly as he ran his hand over the scar again. "Voldemort," Harry said and then smirked as there was no pain, but then he frowned. "You know, I never noticed that the Dark Mark stings when I say his name."

"You call that a sting?" Snape griped.

"I think after what I'm used to, I can deal with the Dark Mark burning a bit."

"I think you're building up a pain tolerance," Snape said dryly as he helped Harry to his feet.

Harry swayed a bit and Snape steadied him. "I think I'm more tired than I thought."

"You did just perform a rather complicated bit of dark magic and it is four in the morning. And you're probably suffering from mild blood loss. I will escort you back to your dorms," Snape said as he hid the

book he needed to return to Dumbledore in his robes and handed Harry his nearly forgotten wand.

Snape left Harry a corridor away from Gryffindor Tower as Harry insisted that he could make it back the rest of the way on his own, though now Harry was rather regretting that action as Sirius stepped out in front of him with Professor Dumbledore. Harry tried not to lean on the wall he was supporting himself with but he was just too wiped-out and he could feel sweat soaking the back of his shirt.

“Mr. Potter, what are you doing out of bed at this hour?” Dumbledore questioned almost instantly.

Sirius, however, was more concerned with the way Harry was supporting himself with the wall. “Harry, are you all right?”

Harry nodded. “Yeah, I-I was just –” Harry reached up to adjust his glasses with his right hand that he hadn’t noticed was covered in blood from his rather more soaked shirtsleeve.

“Harry is that blood?” Sirius exclaimed.

“I –” Harry started as he looked at his sleeve and hand in confusion and then reached up and ran his left hand over the serpent scar under the collar of his shirt. His hand came away covered in blood, it wasn’t sweat soaking his shirt. “Oh, uh oh,” Harry whispered before he collapsed to the ground. That was why he was so tired.

“Harry!” Dumbledore and Sirius both yelled as he slid down the wall.

“I don’t feel so good, Sirius,” Harry said as he closed his eyes as his head swam dizzily and then he felt himself being levitated.

“It’s going to be all right, Harry,” Sirius reassured as he walked beside him, though he looked at Dumbledore worryingly who was levitating Harry.

They arrived in the Hospital Wing not too long later and Harry was settled on a bed as Madam Pomfrey was summoned.

“Mr. Potter, what on earth did you do to yourself this time?” Harry almost laughed at the ‘this time,’ but he was rather busy trying to come up with a why he was bleeding from his scar.

Madam Pomfrey proficiently handed him a blood-replenishing potion, which Harry downed without question. “I don’t know. I felt weird when I woke up and then Professor Dumbledore and Sirius found me in the hall.” Harry shook his head and then rubbed it as a headache was forming; it also gave him an excuse not to look at the three while he lied to them. Harry just hoped Snape got the book back without Dumbledore noticing it missing. “I don’t remember how I got there.”

“I’ll be able to examine your scar more easily if you remove your shirt, Mr. Potter,” Madam Pomfrey said briskly.

Alarm bells suddenly went off in Harry’s head and he moved away from Madam Pomfrey like she was about to electrocute him. “No, I’m fine!” Harry said and slid off the bed still a little wobbly.

“Harry, what is wrong?” Dumbledore asked.

“Nothing’s wrong. I’m feeling better is all,” Harry said quickly as he backed away from them, he was feeling better.

“Harry, why don’t you want to remove your shirt?” Sirius asked, eyeing his godson.

“It’s – I don’t see a need to, I’m fine now,” Harry said adamantly and then he ran out of the Hospital Wing, probably not the smartest idea on his part.

“Mr. Potter!” Dumbledore shouted after him but Harry didn’t even slow.

Harry ran quite a ways before he saw Snape walking toward the direction of the dungeons. “Professor!” hissed Harry and Snape turned just in time to see Harry running towards him. “Hide me, excuses, alibis, something! They want to remove my shirt!”

“They as in –”



"Them," Harry pointed over his shoulder as he continued to run past Snape. Just as Dumbledore, Sirius and Madam Pomfrey came around the corner.

"Harry Potter, stop this instant!" Dumbledore shouted; annoyance clear in his voice. Harry stopped at the tone in the old wizard's voice and turned back around.

"Albus, Poppy, Black, what is going on?" Snape asked as he looked back at Harry who was standing in the hall with a defeated look on his face and breathing heavily.

"That is what we want to know," Sirius snapped at Snape. "Harry, come here," Sirius said sternly. Harry hesitated but then walked towards Sirius with his head down. He stopped by Snape though, hoping the man could offer him some protection against the inevitable.

"Mr. Potter, why did you run out of the Hospital Wing when Madam Pomfrey suggested removing your shirt?" Dumbledore asked.

"I can explain that," Snape said without hesitation. "The Weasley twins had him sample one of their products they are testing. Patches of his skin are rather scaly at the moment as well as black and blue. He came to me for a remedy just before curfew; he didn't want to get the Weasley twins in trouble when it was by his own stupidity that he sampled one of their products." Snape sneered; he even put a bit of amusement in his voice. Harry's respect for the man raised tenfold. The man was just masterful, no wonder Voldemort never found out he was a spy.

"Is this true, Harry?" Sirius asked. Harry nodded while giving the adults a rather sheepish expression.

"Sorry," he mumbled. "I really do feel better though."

--

A/N: And thus begins third year

## Chapter Fourteen – The Boggart

Harry skidded into the Potions classroom just as Snape was about to close the door, Hermione right behind him. “Potter, Granger, you are late.”

“Sorry, Professor Snape,” Harry said quietly, as he was gasping for air from his run. “We got held back by Professor Vector.” Harry handed over a permission note signed by the professor. Harry looked in the classroom and noted that Ron was looking at the two of them funny. Obviously he noticed that they had disappeared on the way to Potions.

Snape nodded and allowed the two to their seats at the front of the class. Harry slid in front of Ron while Hermione sat in front of Neville.

“What did Vector want with you,” Ron whispered.

“Wanted to make sure we understood the homework assignment,” Harry whispered back as he retrieved his Potions book from his bag.

“You’re in Arithmancy?” Ron asked. Harry nodded. “Wait a minute, isn’t Arithmancy during Transfiguration?”

“Honestly, Ronald, how can someone be in two places at once?” Hermione asked quietly as she too was pulling out her Potions book.

Harry snorted and bit his lip to keep from laughing out loud. “Yeah, Ron, how can someone be in two places at once?” Ron just gave the two a bewildered glare.

“Uh oh, what’s Malfoy doing?” Hermione whispered about forty minutes later as she prepared more of her ingredients to go into her bubbling cauldron. They were making the Shrinking Solution.

“I don’t know,” Harry whispered back, looking over to where Malfoy was pushing something into Goyle’s simmering potion. “But if he blows something else up, Snape’s going to –”

“Orange, Longbottom,” Snape said in exasperation. Harry and Hermione both turned just in time to see Snape ladling some of the potion and letting it splash back into the cauldron for everyone to see. Neville had turned a nice shade of pink in embarrassment. “Tell me, boy, does anything penetrate that thick skull of yours? Potter, switch places with Weasley and help Longbottom fix his potion!”

“A-alright, sir,” Harry said and quickly switched with a relieved looking Ron, obviously he needed help of his own as his potion was actually a bit on the pink side.

“Mark my words, Longbottom, if Potter can learn to brew a decent potion so can you!” and with that said, Snape stormed back to the front of the stunned class.

About two seconds later Goyle’s potion exploded and covered the majority of the Slytherins in a purple goop. Snape ran his hand down his face before he pointed his wand and cleaned up the mess with one swipe. That of course didn’t clean up the boils that were forming on most of the Slytherins hands and faces.

“Because of Mr. Malfoy’s blatant attempt to get himself injured again, the Gryffindors will receive full marks today, and Draco you have just lost your house fifty points and gained yourself a week’s detention with the headmaster!” Draco opened his mouth to protest but Snape cut him off, “Now everyone OUT!” he shouted as he pointed at the door.

No one had to be told twice as both the Gryffindors and the Slytherins quickly packed their things away and exited the dungeons. But they weren’t so lucky to have gotten out of class early; by the time they were cleaned up and had their things packed away, class was just ending anyways. The Gryffindors were in stitches as they made their way up to lunch and the Slytherins sulked off to the hospital wing.

“Did you see the look on the Slytherin’s faces,” Ron exclaimed as he, Harry, and Hermione climbed the steps into the entrance hall. “Full marks for us and Fifty points from Slytherin, that’s great, don’t you think; Harry, Hermione?” Neither Harry nor Hermione answered and

Ron turned around to look for them as Neville, Dean and Seamus stopped as well.

“Where’d they go?” he asked with a perplexed look. “They were right behind us.”

“There’s Hermione,” pointed Seamus.

Hermione ran up the stairs panting slightly as she clutched her heavy book bag and tucked something into the front of her robes.

“How did you do that?” asked Ron.

“What?” Hermione asked as she joined them.

“One moment you were right behind us, the next moment you were back at the bottom of the stairs again.”

“What?” Hermione asked looking slightly confused. “Oh – I had to go back for something. Oh no –” Hermione exclaimed as the contents of her bag fell as the seam gave way on her bag.

“I told you, you shouldn’t be caring so much,” Harry said as he appeared by Hermione’s side breathing a bit heavily himself and bent down to help Hermione pick up her things.

“Aah! Where did you come from?” exclaimed Ron as he fell backwards.

Harry chuckled. “What do you mean, Ron, I’ve been here the entire time.”

“But –”

“I hope there’s something good for lunch, I’m starving,” Hermione cut off Ron as she now had all her books back in her bag. She smiled at Harry and marched off towards the Great Hall. Harry helped Ron up and then followed after her.

Ron turned to a bewildered Seamus, Dean, and Neville. "D'you get the feeling they're not telling us something?" The other three just shrugged.

--

After lunch, where Ron wouldn't shut up about their Potions class, Harry sat down with the other Gryffindors in Defense Against the Dark Arts. He looked around wondering where Professor Lupin was when he finally came into the classroom and announced that the lesson would be a practical one. That was when Harry remembered what this lesson was and he paled dramatically.

"Oh no," he whispered under his breath as the rest of the class got up to follow Lupin out. Harry was the last one out of the classroom and the last one hesitantly to enter the staffroom after Lupin had chased off Peeves and gained the other Gryffindors respect.

Harry looked at the wardrobe with trepidation, wondering if he shouldn't just skip the lesson. But as Snape began a sneering contest with a smiling Remus, Professor Lupin started to explained what was going to happen and how to counter it and then the lesson started in earnest and Harry was pushed into line in front of Hermione by Dean, who shot into line himself.

One by one, each student had a go and surprisingly Neville's wasn't Professor Snape but a rather large plant that Harry recognized as Devil's Snare, which knotted itself into bows. By the time it was nearing Harry's turn, Harry was certain he could make the Dementor into something laughable.

"Excellent, Ron your next!" Lupin said jovially, though he gave Harry a pointed look that stated that Harry didn't have to go if he didn't want to.

Harry simply nodded that he was okay as he watched Ron's spider spin his way. The Gryffindors gave him encouraging smiles. Harry took in a deep breath, just noticing that Snape had stayed behind to watch, and pictured the Dementor, that was going to turn from the spider, in a pink frilly wedding dress.

Harry aimed his wand expecting the gnarled hand and ice-cold feeling of the Dementor but neither ever came, instead something far worse came from the spider, and Harry staggered backward as it towered into view of the rest of the class.

Harry dropped his wand and fell as he tried to scramble away in utter terror, but his limbs seemed to have stopped working. "No!" Harry whimpered.

It was Voldemort in the flesh and holding in his hand, pointed at Harry, was a fire red sphere and he was chanting something that had been forever imbedded into Harry's memory. "Stigmatis de Tempusoris, Stigmatis de Mortis, Sigillum de Parcaearum. Stigmatis de Tempusoris, Stigmatis de Mortis..." With each string of Latin the sphere grew redder.

Harry felt like he couldn't breathe as pain started to well up in his chest and memories started to flood his mind. Snape jumped in front of the Boggart and it turned into a werewolf, then a rat, and then was swept back into the wardrobe where the door was securely shut. Harry tried to gasp for breath as the chanting continued on in his mind.

"Harry are you alright, what was that?" Lupin asked worriedly as the rest of the class stared at Harry, pale and shaking on the floor in fear as the memory still was fresh in his mind.

"Move," Snape commanded as he all but pushed Lupin out of the way and grabbed Harry's chin so Harry was looking him in the eyes. "Harry, look at me... Breathe, it was not real, it was a Boggart," Snape said firmly. "You must breathe, clear your mind, it wasn't real," he stated again.

Harry nodded as a tear slid down his cheek as the memory slowly left him. "It was real," he whispered and then he took a deep breath in and pushed Snape aside and sprinted out of the staffroom, he didn't even pick up his wand or bag. Harry made it all of two corridors before he stopped and slid down the wall and put his head in his hands as sobs wracked his body.

"You're Boggart was when he branded you with the Death Mark wasn't it?" Snape asked quietly as he slid down the wall and sat next to Harry.

Harry nodded without looking up. "It was pain like nothing I'd ever felt before, not just physical... My worst memories were ripped through my mind over and over again with such clarity and all the while was Voldemort chanting. He was barely whispering and still it felt like he was screaming the words," Harry said shakily. "And the pain, it was like having my heart ripped out over and over and over again..." Harry sobbed burying his face further into his arms. Snape put his hand on Harry's shoulder and squeezed gently.

Snape stayed sitting by his side until Harry stopped sobbing and got himself under control. "Lupin is likely to tell Dumbledore about your Boggart," Snape commented after a while.

"I'll tell him it was a dream," Harry said quietly as he wiped his eyes.

"Harry, Boggarts take on the image of the thing we fear the most, as you well know. A dream cannot conjure up something that fearful without there being a base in reality," Snape said lightly, looking at Harry.

"Well what am I supposed to say? The branding spheres aren't even supposed to exist! Voldemort I suppose I can explain, but not knowing of the sphere or the words to the curse..." Harry ran a hand through his hair, which was rather damp through sweat. "I suppose I can just avoid him for the next few days and hope he forgets to ask, or gets too busy," he muttered.

Snape only nodded. "It is getting more difficult for you to keep your secret. You're lucky last week I was able to come up with an excuse for your early morning wanderings covered in blood, not to mention stopping Poppy from ripping your shirt off."

"Ugg, don't say it like that," Harry shivered, "I think you've given me a new Boggart."

Snape chuckled lightly.

“On the plus side of that, I can say the Dark Lord’s name again without excruciating pain,” Harry cheeked.

Snape rolled his eyes. “Be careful, Harry, it could cause a lot of problems if anyone found out you were from the future.”

“Don’t I know it – Well, I better go butter up Professor Lupin and see if I can’t convince him to not tell Dumbledore about my Boggart,” Harry said with a sigh as he stood and pushed himself off the wall.

Snape stood as well. “Do you want me to come with you? I could frighten him into submission.” Snape said with a smirk.

Harry shook his head. “No thank you, Professor, I think I can handle Professor Lupin on my own.”

“Very well, and don’t go running into anymore Boggarts will you. It’s not very much fun seeing a shattered Harry Potter,” Snape said seriously.

Harry nodded, his mind flickering back on how much fear the Boggart had brought on him. Snape squeezed his shoulder once and then turned and left, his robes billowing in the usual manor. Harry watched after the man. It was odd to think that just over a year ago they hated – or rather loathed each other, and now... Snape was his support. Harry really didn’t know where he’d be if he didn’t have the man to talk to, it was almost like having... Harry shook his head. Was Severus Snape actually becoming like a father to him? There was a time when Sirius was the closest thing to a father Harry had ever had, but Sirius and him had never really had down to earth talks like Snape and him had...

Harry shook his head again in bewilderment and set out back to Remus’ classroom. Merlin he hoped he could convince the werewolf not to tell Dumbledore.

Unfortunately, Harry never had the chance, just as he rounded the corner he ran into Malfoy and a bunch of other Slytherins. Harry was going to shove past them when Malfoy blocked him.



“What’s the matter, Potter, you look like you’ve been crying. Did something big and scary upset you?” Pansy Parkinson teased, using a baby voice that sounded too much like Bellatrix Lestrange for Harry’s liking.

Merlin, Harry hated how fast news traveled in Hogwarts. “Shove off,” Harry hissed and tried to move past the group of Slytherins again but he was pushed up against the wall by Malfoy.

“What’s wrong, Potter, afraid of a big scary man with a globe?” Malfoy sneered.

Harry’s eyes blazed with fire at that and he snarled angrily and then pulled back his fist and punched Draco in the jaw. Malfoy stumbled back against the opposite wall and then Harry shoved him hard against it and held him there with his arm. “That man was Lord Voldemort!” Harry seethed and Draco’s eyes widened. “If you ever saw him in the flesh you’d piss yourself! So forgive me if I’m afraid of the man who killed my parents!” Harry growled not realizing that he was cutting off Draco’s air supply until he was suddenly pulled off Malfoy forcefully. He hadn’t even heard Lupin and Sirius yelling at him to drop Draco.

“What in Merlin’s name do you think you’re doing, Harry?” Sirius shouted angrily as he let Harry go once he’d stopped struggling.

Harry’s eyes lost the fire in them as he looked at Draco, who was on the floor, having slid down the wall after being released, and was taking in large gulps of air, his jaw turning several shades of purple. The other Slytherins were staring at Harry with fear in their eyes a few feet off, obviously they had run to get a Professor.

“I-I’m sorry,” Harry said quietly as he hung his head. He didn’t have any idea what had just come over him.

Sirius grabbed Harry’s arm roughly so that Harry was turned towards him. “Sorry doesn’t cut it, Harry. You could have seriously hurt him!” Sirius snapped pointing at Draco.

"I –" Harry attempted.

"What was going through your brain? Strike that, obviously not much!" Sirius seethed. "James never acted like this!"

Harry suddenly shook Sirius's hand off him roughly. "Don't compare me to my dad, Sirius! I'm not James Potter!" Harry shouted and started to walk away.

"Harry, stop, we aren't finished!" Sirius said sternly, grabbing Harry's arm again, this time his hand clamped over the Dark Mark and Harry seethed and tried to shake Sirius' hand off again but Sirius had a firm hold, and didn't seem to notice that he was causing his godson quite a bit of pain.

"It wasn't entirely his fault, Professor Black," Draco said suddenly from the floor where Lupin was looking at his swelling jaw. Both Harry and Sirius looked at him as Sirius dropped Harry's arm. "W-we started it. We didn't know, I-I shouldn't have said anything about... him."

Harry looked at Draco in shock but then shook his head. "No I should've controlled myself. I'm sorry for hitting you, Draco."

Draco got to his feet and held out his hand to Harry. "Truce, Potter, we were both in the wrong."

Harry looked at Draco's hand for a moment before he nodded and shook the blond's hand. The other Slytherins gaped at the two while Remus and Sirius shook their heads in bewilderment, not knowing whether they should punish both of them, or let them off for making up.

A/N: More to come soon.

## Chapter Fifteen – The Dueling Class and the Dementors of Hogwarts

The next Monday was the first – well second Dueling class, but as the first was really more of an introduction class and they hadn't actually done any dueling, this class was really counted as the first and the Gryffindors had their class with the Slytherins.

Hermione and Harry, as per usual it seemed, both ran into class just as the class was to start. Everyone was really not surprised by this as the two always seemed to be running just on time. The only one who kept questioning it was Ron. And it was normally something like, 'Where'd you come from?' and 'Weren't you just – ?' which Harry and Hermione successfully managed to brush off or change the subject, though the two always seemed to have a knowing smile and a twinkle in their eyes.

It was no different today, as soon as the two slid into their seats, Ron asked, "Where'd you go? You left breakfast with me but then disappeared."

Harry shook his head. "I forgot my Runes book," he said without missing a beat.

"Ginny pulled me aside to ask me a question," Hermione said directly after.

"You're taking Runes? But Ginny was –" Whatever the rest of what Ron was going to say was cut off as Sirius began class.

"Good Morning Class, today we are actually going to be doing some dueling." There was a scattering of applause at that. "Now, I know last year Professor – if I can call him a Professor – Lockhart attempted to hold a Dueling club and he invited Professor Snape in to help him demonstrate. I have done the same, but instead of me going up against him as I know he would simply love to try and put me in my place," there was some laughter at that. "I have asked Harry Potter, who has been having lessons with him daily, to come up and duel with Professor Snape."

Snape stepped forward from the edge of the classroom, where few had noticed him there and Harry stood from his desk to move to the small dueling platform that took up the front of the classroom. Ron and Hermione both looked at each other and then at Harry, Harry hadn't told them that Sirius had asked him to demonstrate.

Harry had actually not wanted to as he was afraid it might arise Dumbledore's suspicions about the block having been removed from Snape, but the Potions Professor had said that he would keep his spells at low level, which was probably a very good thing as Professor Dumbledore had come to watch today's lesson. Apparently he was interested in seeing exactly what Snape had been teaching Harry in their extra lessons, which he had let continue even though Harry couldn't be his official apprentice until he was fourteen.

Harry jumped up onto the slightly raised platform and took his position in front of Professor Snape; they both bowed in demonstration and then walked their respectful ten paces. Sirius raised his wand and an eyebrow, looking between the two before he allowed sparks to shoot from his wand and abruptly got out of the way, and it was a good thing he did as the spells instantly started flying between the two in a rainbow of colors and a muttering of hexes and curses. That only lasted a few moments before the two suddenly stopped and stared at each other, both with their wands raised at the ready. Already everyone was holding their breaths to see who would take the next shot after the pretty light show.

Harry smirked in amusement, as did Snape. "How about it, Professor Snape, why don't you let me know what your next curse is going to be?"

"Oh, but then it wouldn't be a surprise, Potter," Snape chuckled darkly.

"But you know how much I hate surprises, Professor; my entire life is a surprise, so why don't you at least give me a hint?" Harry quipped back.

"Alright, you learned it in first year," Snape sneered.

"I learned a lot in first year," Harry said. "But I bet it's going to be something like –" Harry didn't finish as he dodged to the right as Snape sent a silent Wingardium Leviosa and then he dodges back when an

Expelliarmus was sent directly afterwards, the spell almost hitting him.

A gleam came into Harry's eyes and he whipped out his wand like a snake strike. "Serpensortia," Harry said loudly and a gasp went through the classroom as a rather large snake was conjured, but Snape banished it not a second later.

"Playing a little dark, aren't we, Harry?" Snape gripped, he obviously hadn't expected Harry to use that one.

"No more dark than a Slytherin, Professor," Harry bowed slightly mockingly, but that bow cost him as Snape took the opportunity to send a string of low level disarming hexes at Harry.

Harry smirked thinking that the man was using his own tactic against him and erected a rather powerful shield to absorb the spells instead of jumping out of the way. He didn't expect the one rather more powerful hex to be at the head and his shield shattered and he took the full brunt of the disarming hexes that followed and was thrown off his feet and his wand sailed into a smiling Snape's hand.

Snape walked over and looked down at Harry smugly. "Always expect the unexpected, Harry," he said as he handed Harry back his wand and held his hand out to help Harry back to his feet. The class was laughing at the display.

Harry smiled as soon as his hand was around his wand and a stinging hex he released and hit Snape in the leg. Snape grabbed his leg at the unexpected sting and dropped his own wand in the process, which Harry summoned all too easily and jumped back to his feet fluidly. "Constant Vigilance, Professor Snape," Harry barked back and Snape scowled up at him while rubbing his leg.

"Indeed."

The class laughed and applauded as Harry took a bow, still holding both his and Professor Snape's wands. He was no fool; he knew the second he handed over the wand, the man was going to get revenge and Snape was very good at getting revenge.

--

That evening found Harry lying on his back in Professor Snape's office after a rather rigorous Occlumency session. He was staring up at the ceiling while Snape was working on some student essays that needed to be handed back the next day.

"Who do you suppose sent the Dementors after me this summer? I mean I suppose it was under the Dark Lord's orders, but it had to be someone from the inside as I don't think he's got his non-corporeal hands into Azkaban yet." Harry was really thinking out loud, as he did after most Occlumency sessions, but Snape always seemed to answer anyways.

"Yet; you mean he managed to take Azkaban?" Snape asked with worry in his voice.

"Yeah, broke out the Lestrage's and a bunch of other Death Eaters my fifth year..." Harry trailed off. "You don't suppose it could be the same person who did it the last time?"

"I don't know; someone's sent Dementors after you before?" Snape asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Yes, just before fifth year, Umbridge ordered the Dementors after me, that was just before she took over the Defense Against the Dark Arts position and turn Hogwarts upside down. Of course I didn't know it had been her until the end of the year."

"Deloris Umbridge, as in the Minister of Magic's new Undersecretary?" Snape asked as he wrote down something on a piece of paper.

"One in the same," Harry sighed and then looked at Snape. "Why?"

“Because she is a Death Eater,” Snape stated. “I’m just going to send a little anonymous note onto Kingsley Shacklebolt to check the Undersecretary’s left arm for any tattoos.”

Harry sat up. “That would explain everything about her.” Harry looked at his watch and noted it was just about curfew. “She did the funniest thing after the Centaurs got a hold of her. All you had to do was make clip-clop noises with your tongue and she’d look around fearfully, it was quiet hilarious, or would have been had I not just found out about a Prophecy and my godfather hadn’t just died,” Harry muttered. “Well its almost curfew, I should get going. Keep me posted on Umbridge; hopefully I can avoid having any more incidences with Dementors.”

Snape nodded. “Goodnight, Harry.”

“Goodnight, Professor,” Harry said just before he picked up his book bag and left the office.

Harry was just about out of the Dungeons when his name was called from behind and he stopped and turned around. It was Draco Malfoy. “Potter, can we talk a moment?”

Harry hesitated before he nodded. “Sure, what’s up?”

“Not here,” he said as he looked around and then dragged Harry into a nearby classroom that looked like it hadn’t been used in decades. Draco closed the door and then put up a Silencing charm and then he turned back to Harry. “I’ve seen my father react that way also when his arm is grabbed.”

Harry looked at Draco in confusion. “What are you talking about?”

“When Professor Black grabbed your arm when you tried to walk away after we got in that fight, you were in pain, you hid it well, but I’m used to seeing my father hide it too. You’ve got the Dark Mark on your arm,” Draco stated.

Harry laughed slightly. “Draco, your delusional, I don’t have the Dark Mark on my arm.”

Draco suddenly and unexpectedly grabbed Harry's left arm and tore back his sleeve just enough to expose enough of the mark to know it for what it was but not enough to show his curse scar. "Yes you do."

Harry pulled his arm back and hid the mark. "Draco, you can't tell anyone," Harry said with deadly seriousness. "If anyone were to find out —"

"I won't, I just; he's back then?" Draco asked with nervousness in his voice.

Harry nodded. "Yes, but this wasn't given to me willingly, so don't go thinking I support my parents murderer."

"No, I didn't think that. My father said when the Dark Lord was back that I was to be brought before him. I was just wondering... what's he like?" Draco asked hesitantly.

"Scary," Harry said quietly, the memories of every time he'd met Voldemort face to face flashing through his mind. Harry looked up to Draco, seriousness in his eyes. "I'd advise you to do anything you can not to be in his presence," Harry said firmly after a few moments of silence.

"I think the only way that will happen is if I turn over my father to the ministry, and I'm not sure I can do that," Draco said as he looked at his feet. Harry could almost feel the fear and uncertainty rolling off Draco.

"You've got time, not a lot, but some. He doesn't have a body at the moment and I hope he doesn't gain one anytime soon as I'm not ready to face him yet," Harry said quietly and Draco looked up at Harry, an unreadable expression on his face.

--

For the following few days everything was really quiet at Hogwarts, but Hogwarts, being Hogwarts, the quiet wasn't to last. It was Friday morning and Harry, Ron, and Hermione had just sat down to a rather late breakfast when the morning post arrived. Harry had just taken a



sip from his pumpkin juice as he picked up the Daily Prophet; when he promptly spit it back out at the title on the front page.

Pettigrew Escapes Ministry Holding and Undersecretary to the Minister Revealed Marked Death Eater!

“Damn it!” Harry nearly yelled, not even bothering to read the article, he already knew all he cared to know. People were already turning to look at him for his outburst, Harry didn’t much care. “That bloody bastard escaped!” Harry seethed as he threw the paper on the table and got up and stormed out of the Great Hall. Hermione glanced over the article for a moment and then followed after Harry, leaving Ron looking at the front page with his mouth hanging open. Ron still couldn’t believe that Pettigrew had been his pet rat Scabbers.

“Harry,” Hermione called. “Harry, would you please stop!” Harry stopped and spun around to glare at the witch. “Look, I know your angry, but there’s not much you can do about it. The Order will take care of it,” Hermione reasoned as soon as she caught up with Harry.

“Yeah, sure Hermione, just like the Order’s found out who sent those Dementors after me and my family? Just like the Order’s found out who intercepted my mail? Just like the Order –”

“Harry, I understand you’re frustrated, I would be to, but you don’t have to shout at me!” Hermione said heatedly.

Harry looked at his feet and took in a deep breath to calm himself down. “I’m sorry, Hermione, your right about everything, I should let the Order take care of it.”

Hermione gave Harry a small smile and then took his hand. “Come on we have a full day today. If we get a head start we can still have breakfast from the kitchens.” Harry smiled back and squeezed Hermione’s hand and let out a soft chuckle before the two disappeared just as Ron rounded into the corridor looking rather baffled.

“Where did they go?”

“Come on, Ronald, we’re going to be late for Charms,” Hermione said breathlessly, grabbing his arm as she sped past.

“Yeah, Ron, come on,” Harry said running just on her heels.

“But you were – and you were – how –?”

“Ron we don’t have time for this,” Hermione said as she pulled on her baffled friend’s arm. Ron had no choice but to follow.

The three were just outside the Charms classroom when Sirius jogged up to them. “Harry, can I have a word?”

“Siri – umm, Professor Black, I’ve got charms just now, can it wait till later?” Harry asked as he looked at Hermione, Hermione looked anxiously back and pushed Ron into the classroom at the same time as looking down the hallway.

“It really can’t, Harry.”

“Well you can talk in the classroom,” Hermione said urgently and actually pushed Sirius into the already full classroom, Harry dodged in afterwards, closing the door rather loudly so that the seated students looked up to them.

“Miss Granger, what on earth –?”

“Sorry, Professor Black, just anxious for class is all,” Hermione giggle nervously and took her seat.

Harry shook his head. “Yeah, full lesson today and all, Professor, should be interesting,” Harry said, trying not to laugh outright.

Sirius looked between the two students before he shook his head and turned back to Harry. The other students took that as a sign to go back to they’re unpacking of books and parchment and such.

“Harry, Professor Dumbledore is going to make the announcement at lunch, but I thought you should know sooner. The Dementors of

Azkaban are going to be at Hogwarts until Pettigrew is caught," Sirius said softly so as not to alert the other students.

Harry had no qualms. "What! The minister can't seriously think that's a good idea!" he shouted.

"Harry, please keep your voice down, Pettigrew wasn't the only one who escaped. Umbridge did as well," Sirius said very quietly.

"So now there are two Death Eaters on the loose, both who probably are out to kill me, and they want to protect me with the bloody Dementors? This is just wonderful," Harry said loudly and sarcastically. The students in the Charms classroom were now all looking at Harry. "Next thing you'll know, they're going to want to lock me in a little cell for my own protection! You know my life would probably be absolutely marvelous if everyone would just stop trying to protect me! I can take care of myself!" Harry shouted and then stormed out of the Charms classroom slamming the door behind him.

"That could have gone better," Sirius whispered as the class all stared at him.

Harry stormed all the way down to the Dungeons where he walked into Snape's office and shut the door firmly behind him. The man in question looked up from his desk as his door loudly shut and watched as Harry paced back and forth restlessly.

"I take it you've found out about the Dementors," Snape said calmly.

"Do they even care what the Dementors do to me?" Harry finally said heatedly as he dropped down into a chair. "I nearly had my soul sucked out this summer because I couldn't even fight back! If Sirius and the others, hadn't shown up when they did... I don't even have to be in close proximity to the damn things anymore..."

"You'll have to avoid them –" Snape started.

"Yeah, that really helped the last time," Harry said sarcastically. "Sirius and I both nearly had our souls sucked out and of course I can't forget the Quidditch match. I fainted and fell off my broom!"

"You'll just have to try harder to avoid them," Snape said dryly. "Now aren't you supposed to be in Ancient Runes?"

"Charms, I have Charms right now," Harry said distractedly as he leaned on Snape's desk.

"Then you should be there," Snape stated and pointedly looked at the door.

Harry rolled his eyes and took the hint as he got up and headed towards the door. "Right, see you in Potions, Professor."

"Harry, it'll be fine. They'll capture Pettigrew and Umbridge eventually," Snape said before Harry could leave the office.

"Oh, that I have no doubt of, it's the trouble I just know they're going to cause before they're captured," Harry said over his shoulder and left the office a lot more calmly than when he had come in.

Snape shook his head as he watched him leave. "That boy has more problems than Rome," he muttered under his breath.

A/N: He really does.

## Chapter Sixteen – Quidditch and One Class Too Many

Between never ending Quidditch practices, extra lessons with Snape, avoiding Dementors and Dumbledore, homework, and classes, Harry was very quickly becoming overwhelmed. And with being overwhelmed came stress and with the stress came irritability. Even Hermione was steering clear of him these days, but she seemed to be steering clear of everyone, she was probably rather overwhelmed as well.

Harry was seriously considering dropping the Dueling class, which he wasn't learning much in anyways. The only reason he hadn't yet was because Sirius taught the class and he didn't want to hurt his godfather's feelings. Sirius was already touchy because Harry had formed such a strong connection with Snape. Harry was really beginning to see the potions master as less of a professor and more of a father.

Of course at the moment, Harry really wanted to shove the man off the Astronomy Tower.

"You must concentrate, Potter, you must be able to duel while the Dark Lord is in your mind or he will kill you in a matter of moments," Snape lectured as he sent another stinging hex at Harry while pushing his Legilimency assault further into Harry's mind.

It was the day after a rather uneventful Halloween where Harry wasn't allowed to go to Hogsmead for his safety, and Harry and Snape were in the Room of Requirement. They had moved their lessons there because Snape was sick of having to replace furniture when Harry managed to fight back. Harry had a tendency of making things explode.

Harry growled as he dodged the stinging hex – barely – as he tried to push Snape from his mind just as another stinging hex shot towards him. Harry tried to erect a shield this time as he was slowly losing the energy to dodge out of the way, but the shield wasn't quick enough and the hex hit him in his wand arm. Harry gasped and dropped his wand and that was all the distraction Snape needed to plow into his mind and drive Harry to his knees.

Snape quickly left his mind after that, but it still left Harry with a splitting headache. Harry laid down on the floor breathing heavily and looked up at Snape. "This is hopeless! I'm supposed to be stronger than this by now! If the Dark Lord were to gain a body right now and come after me, I'd be defeated as quickly as I was the last time!" Harry nearly shouted in frustration.

Snape held out his hand to help Harry up off the floor. "You are getting better," Snape said calmly as he saw the depression settle over Harry's eyes.

Harry took Snape's hand and pulled himself up. "Then why don't I feel that way? You are always able to break into my mind in the end. I've been practicing Occlumency for over two years; I should be able to block you! If I can't block you, I can't block him!"

"You lasted for a half an hour this time, Harry," Snape said with amusement and compassion in his eyes. "You shouldn't be so hard on yourself. I guarantee that the Dark Lord is not going to use a Legilimency assault for that long, not in a duel. He doesn't have the patience."

Harry chuckled darkly. "Yes he is a tad impatient, isn't he," Harry sobered. "While dueling anyways, torturing on the other hand..." Harry trailed off as he ran his hand through his hair and turned away from Snape.

Snape put a hand on Harry's shoulder. "Are you still having nightmares?" he asked concern in his voice.

"Some, but not nearly as often as I used to," Harry said quietly, thinking about the nightmare he'd had just the night before. He hoped it was only a nightmare; he didn't want to think about if it wasn't. Harry turned back to look at Snape. "Having the Dementors here isn't helping any. One got pretty close during Quidditch practice the other day; luckily I was able to stay on my broom. It's almost as if they're drawn to me. If I didn't have Occlumency I'd be passing out on a regular basis."

"You should tell Albus they're getting too close to the school," Snape commented.

"I would but I'm still avoiding him," Harry reminded.

"He hasn't forgotten about your Boggart yet?" Snape asked, worry in his voice.

Harry shook his head. "Nope, not that I thought he would, but I think he's starting to realize that I'm avoiding him. Just the other day I actually turned around and walked the other way and this was after pretending to forget a summons for tea," Harry chuckled humorlessly.

"Perhaps you should tell him the truth. He is bound to find out eventually," Snape said looking at Harry pointedly, Harry glared at him.

"He's not ready to hear the truth!" Harry snapped in annoyance. "So you can just stop suggesting it!"

Snape was taken aback by that and was about to argue back but then shook his head. There was no point in arguing as Harry was set in his mind. "Very well," he said quietly, dropping the matter. Harry turned away again and scratched at his left arm, this didn't go unnoticed by Snape. "How's the cutting?" Snape asked almost casually.

Harry stopped scratching immediately. "I don't know what you're talking about," he mumbled. Snape grabbed his arm and pulled up the sleeve.

"Harry, you promised you were going to stop," he said as he surveyed Harry's left arm that held more than just shallow cuts, but also some rather deep ones. He then took Harry's right arm and inspected that as well as Harry looked at his feet in embarrassment.

"I did stop," Harry said quietly. "For a while, but after the Boggart and... I guess everything is just getting to me," Harry sighed.

"Why didn't you tell me, I could have helped you?" Snape asked as he ran his wand over Harry's arms, healing the worst of the cuts. "This is worse than last time, these cuts are too deep."

"I slipped," Harry said feebly. "Several times," Harry amended when Snape glared at him. "I don't know why I didn't come to you. I guess I was ashamed because I started again."

"No more cutting, Harry," Snape said firmly as he rolled back down Harry's sleeves. "I mean it," he said sternly when Harry rolled his eyes. "If you have the urge again, I want you to come to me. I don't care what time of day it is. Any number of these cuts could have hit a vein. I'm sure fate didn't give you another chance at life just for you to kill yourself!"

Harry nodded his head and sighed. Snape was right. "Alright, no more cutting, I don't know why I do it anyways," Harry said honestly. Snape squeezed his shoulder reassuringly as Harry glanced at his watch. "Damn, its way past curfew again, we really should have the room supply us with a clock or something," Harry said as he quickly left the Room of Requirement, Snape right behind him.

"No, you do remember what happened last time we asked the room for a clock?" Snape asked dryly and Harry snorted.

"You have to admit, Professor, it was rather amusing," Harry said after a bit of silence between the two as they were both remembering the ordeal.

Snape chuckled at the memory. "Yes, but having the Sands of Time up to our ankles was not what I had in mind."

"I think I was dumping sand out of my shoes for a week," Harry laughed but he stopped suddenly as they approached the Fat Lady's portrait. "That doesn't look good." The Fat Lady was nowhere to be seen and her portrait looked like it had been scratched at vigorously.

Suddenly Professor McGonagall came rushing up behind them. "Severus, Mr. Potter, where have you been?" She said breathlessly. "Never mind, Pettigrew tried to break into Gryffindor tower over an



hour ago. You were the only two missing; we thought something had happened to you!"

"What?" Snape and Harry asked at the same time.

"I'll explain later. Mr. Potter, the students are sleeping in the Great Hall tonight. Come, I'm sure your friends are missing you and your godfather is about to tear his hair out," McGonagall said hastily as she steered Harry in the direction of the Great Hall.

Once the three had arrived Ron and Hermione pounced on him, as did Sirius. "Where have you been?" The three asked at once.

"My lesson with Professor Snape, we ran a little late," Harry explained as he motioned to Snape who was conversing with Dumbledore rather heatedly.

"You were with Snape?" Sirius asked darkly and then proceeded to march over to the man.

"Sirius..." Harry started to stop him, too late.

"Snape; I've had enough of these late night lessons with my godson," Sirius snarled. "What were you thinking taking him off school grounds?"

"Where did you come up with that, Black? We've never left school property for a lesson," Snape said calmly back though Harry could hear the irritation in his voice, obviously Dumbledore had asked the same question.

"We have evidence to the contrary, Severus," Dumbledore stated.

"According to this, you were nowhere on school property," Sirius said with a somewhat triumphant gleam in his eyes. Harry recognized the parchment he held, immediately. The Marauders' Map; how had he gotten it? The Weasley twins were supposed to have it.

"And what is that supposed to be?" Snape sneered.

“A map of the school and grounds that shows where every person is in Hogwarts; you and Harry were not seen on the map until a few minutes ago.” By now there were many students looking on in interest.

“Then your map must be wrong, because we did not leave Hogwarts –” Snape started.

“If that is true then where were you?” Dumbledore questioned.

“We were in an unused room,” Snape answered.

“Then why is it you didn’t hear the announcement calling everyone to the Great Hall?” Sirius countered.

“We were in the middle of a very involved lesson –” Snape began but Sirius interrupted.

“Very involved lesson? Exactly what are you teaching my godson, Snape?” Sirius snapped angrily. “I will not have you teaching him the Dark Arts!”

“Sirius, he’s not –” Harry began.

“I am not teaching him the Dark Arts, Black,” Snape said with a bit of anger surfacing.

“Would you like to make an oath on that, Snape?” Sirius countered.

“No, I would not, I do not make oaths lightly,” Snape seethed.

“That only proves that you are teaching him the Dark Arts, what exactly are you teaching my godson?!” Sirius demanded.

“Harry may not be my apprentice in name yet, Black; but I still hold to the apprenticeship rules. Anything learnt between the Master and the Apprentice stays between the Master and the Apprentice. If you must know, then ask Harry, if he doesn’t tell you, then he obviously doesn’t want you to know,” Snape said evenly.

Sirius turned on Harry. “Well?”

Harry flinched back. "I-I'm sorry, Sirius, but what Professor Snape teaches me, is between him and myself," Harry said quietly as he looked away from Sirius. The man looked like he had just been stabbed in the heart.

"What unused room were you in?" Dumbledore asked Snape.

"We were in the Room of Requirement," Harry stated loudly and everyone turned to him.

"The what?" several of the Professors asked, including Sirius and Remus.

"Room of Requirement," Harry sighed tiredly. "It's a room that only appears when you need it. I found it a few months ago, and since Professor Snape was getting annoyed because I kept blowing up his furniture I suggested using the room."

"You kept blowing up his furniture?" McGonagall asked, "Whatever for?"

"It wasn't on purpose," Harry grouched as he folded his arms across his chest.

--

Harry was very edgy as he stood in the Gryffindor changing rooms waiting for the Quidditch match to start. The weather was rather stormy... okay it was more than stormy. Harry didn't remember the storm being so bad the last time.

Harry had applied a repellant charm on his glasses, so it wouldn't be so difficult to spot the Snitch. The other Gryffindor Quidditch players had just finished gearing up and Oliver Wood gave them all a manic enthusiastic smile in hopes of lifting their mood at having to play in such horrible weather.

Harry just rolled his eyes and followed the team out onto the soaked pitch. He watched as the Slytherin Captain and Wood shook hands.

Harry was more than happy that they were playing Slytherin instead of Hufflepuff. If Harry hadn't stopped Draco from getting kicked by Buckbeak, it was likely that they would still have to play Hufflepuff in this weather.

Harry looked over at the blond Slytherin, he looked absolutely miserable standing amongst his teammates. Harry didn't blame him, he really would have rather had a nice sunny day with a lot of glare than the raging storm they were about to play in.

Madam Hooch gave the order to mount their brooms and Harry swung his leg over his Nimbus 2000 and before he knew it they were in the air and Harry was frantically looking for the snitch. He spotted Draco on the other side of the pitch doing the same. If Harry didn't know how much Wood wanted to win the Quidditch Cup, he wouldn't honestly care who caught the snitch today as long as it was caught and he was out of this weather.

A fork of lighting streaked through the sky followed shortly after by a defining boom of thunder and that was when Harry spotted the snitch for the first time and he dove for it but it was gone a second later. Pulling up from the dive was actually quite difficult as the wind kept whipping him sideways and off his course.

Harry saw Malfoy make a dive himself not a few minutes later but if he had actually seen the snitch it had disappeared again. Another fork of lighting streaked through the sky. This was getting ridiculous and dangerous.

Harry looked across the pitch several times until finally he saw the snitch again and he raced after it. Luck was on his side it seemed as the snitch was in his hand not a moment later, but because of the wind, it made it hard for Harry to land safely at the speed he was going, and he was forced to fly higher before he could go back lower again. Harry could hear the crowd cheer as he tightly held onto the snitch, but that wasn't the only thing he heard and he clutched tightly to his broom as screams echoed in his mind and an intense cold swept over him.

Harry wavered for a moment before he used his Occlumency training and pushed the memories away and looked to see where the Dementors were coming from, but he saw Malfoy double over on his broom first, and then slip off all together. No one had seemed to notice and Draco was far too high.

Harry put on a burst of speed and raced forward on his broom. He let the snitch go and grabbed Malfoy's robes about fifteen feet above the ground. It only succeeded in slowing their decent as the momentum pulled them both towards the ground and Harry lost his hold on his broom and they both hit the ground hard, but it only knocked the wind out of Harry.

That was when a rather large amount of Dementors seemed to glide out onto the pitch and towards Harry as if they were drawn to him. Harry struggled to push aside the memories that were trying to surface again and got to his knees and pointed his wand.

"Expecto Petronum," he managed a light wisp, but that was all. Harry felt darkness clouding his mind and felt a tingling sensation in his chest as the Dementors glided closer. Harry tried to think of any memory, any happy memory, but he couldn't conjure even a wisp this time as the screams of his mum first echoed in his mind.

Just as the echoed screams died to be replaced with the screams of one of his friends a memory flitted over his mind, a memory he'd only ever seen in a picture, but he was seeing it clear as day. His parents smiling down at him as he laughed and clutched with his tiny fists at Padfoot's shaggy fur as the dog nuzzled him.

Harry shot to his feet as more images came to him, memories he shouldn't be remembering as he was way too young, but he was the happiest he'd ever been. "EXPECTO PATRONUM!" Harry bellowed thinking of his family and to Harry's relief Prongs sprung forward brightly and charged the Dementors. The dark creatures scattered and all fled the pitch not seconds later. Prongs pranced back to Harry and bowed before disappearing.

That was when Harry's teammates came running towards him, quickly followed by Madam Pomfrey and Madam Hooch. Harry turned back to Draco, just remembering why he was standing on the ground.

Draco was unconscious, and Harry didn't think it had anything to do with the fall. Now Harry knew why Draco had been trying to get himself injured all month, he'd probably known the effects the Dementors had on him.

"Harry, that was absolutely amazing!" George yelled.

"Brilliant, really, the way you caught the snitch –" Fred called out.

"And then Malfoy –" George continued.

"And then saved us all from the Dementors!" exclaimed the three Gryffindor Chasers.

"Not to mention, you won us the match!" Wood roared and everyone laughed.

Harry's face turned three shades of pink under the praise. "It was nothing," Harry said modestly.

"Harry," Ron suddenly popped up beside them hesitantly, Hermione at his side. "The wind – and the Whomping Willow – and you know how things just kind of splinter when – what I'm trying to say is – your broom."

Harry stared at Ron for a moment trying to comprehend and then he shook his head. "No, not my broom, tell me it isn't so," Harry said grabbing onto the front of Ron's robes.

"I'm really sorry, Mate," Ron said consolingly as he pat Harry on the back. "But yours wasn't the only one, Malfoy's was destroyed too."

--

The next Monday morning Harry had come to a decision he'd been debating all weekend. He was dropping the Dueling Class, he just

didn't have enough time with everything extra he had taken on to get everything done for all his classes, and his grades were starting to slip. Harry had been pacing outside of Sirius' office for about ten minutes now and still he didn't know what he was going to say to his godfather.

Harry took a deep breath and hesitantly knocked on the door. After a few moments where Sirius didn't answer Harry was about to leave, thinking he wasn't in, but just as he turned to go, the door opened. "Harry," Sirius said with a smile on his face.

"Hey, Sirius, do you have a moment?" Harry asked.

"Sure, I was just having tea with Professor Dumbledore, but I'm sure he wouldn't mind if you join us," Sirius said as he opened the door further, revealing Dumbledore sitting in a plush armchair beside Sirius' desk with a cup of tea in his hands.

"Oh, I didn't know you were busy, it can wait," Harry said and started to walk away but Sirius stopped him by wrapping his arm around his shoulders and steering him back into the office.

"Nonsense, come on in."

Harry had no choice but to go into the office. "Good morning, Professor Dumbledore," Harry said politely while he sat down on the edge of his seat, not looking at the older wizard as he did, instead he looked at Sirius. He might as well get it done with now and get out before Dumbledore started asking questions. "I shouldn't stay long; I'm meeting Hermione in the Library before Arithmancy. I just thought I should tell you so you don't wonder where I am. I've decided to drop your class; I just don't have enough time to have it on top of everything else. I'm really sorry Sirius."

"It's perfectly alright, Harry, we wouldn't want you to over work yourself," Sirius said with a smile still on his face, though his eyes showed some disappointment.

Harry nodded. "Your class really is great, Sirius, but to be honest, I'm not learning anything in it that I haven't already learned from Professor Snape."

"Professor Snape is already teaching you Dueling, Harry?" Dumbledore asked suddenly.

Harry opened his mouth to reply but then closed it again, almost immediately realizing his mistake. "Umm, yeah, I mean he doesn't really duel with me much, but he has me practice against targets and he corrects me when I'm wrong," Harry amended quickly, not looking at Dumbledore.

"I'm curious, and don't feel obliged to answer, but what else are you learning from Professor Snape?" Dumbledore asked kindly.

Harry shrugged. "Potions, but mostly he has me reading." It wasn't entirely a lie, he did read a lot in his lessons, but it was mostly stuff he brought along with him from Salazar's Chamber and Snape was reading them as well; especially the potions texts, the man practically drooled the first time Harry had brought him one.

"So he's not teaching you dark magic?" Sirius asked, though his posture was neutral, Harry could hear the slight cynicism in his voice.

Harry looked up at him briefly but then looked down again, "No, of course not."

Sirius let out a deep breath. "Harry, has anyone ever told you how terrible a liar your father was? He could never look anyone in the eye when he was lying."

Harry looked up at Sirius, irritation in his eyes. "I'm not father," Harry stated bluntly.

"No, you are not, but you share many similarities. The inability to lie just happens to be one of them. Is Severus Snape teaching you Dark Magic?" Sirius asked looking Harry directly in the eyes.

Harry growled as he looked away from his godfather. "No."



“Harry, look at me and say that,” Sirius practically demanded.

Harry looked up with all intention of saying it again, but he couldn't keep eye contact to save his life. It was as if he had a curse on him or something that made it impossible for him to lie and look the man in the eye. Harry sighed and looked back up at Sirius. “It's not dark, it's just classified that by the ministry, if anything it's gray,” Harry said quietly.

“What is Professor Snape teaching you, Harry?” Dumbledore asked.

“Potions, Defense Against the Dark Arts, Dueling Tactics, and Occlumency and Legilimency,” Harry answered truthfully, his eyes not leaving Dumbledore.

“Why is he teaching you Occlumency and Legilimency?” Sirius asked.

“I'm a very poor Occlumens, and teaching me Legilimency helps me to learn Occlumency. He's teaching me Occlumency because I asked him to. It helps against the Dementors and... I would have passed out before they had even gotten on the pitch yesterday if I had not known Occlumency,” Harry stated again truthfully, hoping that the two didn't ask what he wasn't saying. He'd almost said his nightmares after Dementors.

“Harry, why didn't you tell me you are affected by the Dementors so much?” Dumbledore asked. He looked positively shocked to hear about this.

“It didn't seem like it would matter. They were going to be here whether I said anything or not,” Harry said shaking his head.

“Harry, you really must start talking to me about these things. I could have talked the minister out of having them here, or at least had not as many stationed around the school.” Harry was surprised by the level of frustration in the Headmaster's voice. “There are so many things I could have, and can still help you with, if you would talk to me every now and then, and yes, Harry, I have noticed that you have been avoiding me. Though I cannot fathom why.”

Harry stared at Dumbledore for a moment in shock. Remus hadn't told him about his Boggart. He looked away. "I'm sorry, Sir," Harry said quietly.

"Why have you been avoiding the Headmaster, Harry?" Sirius asked.

Harry let out a nervous sort of laugh. "I have no idea..."

A/N: Hehehe!

## Chapter Seventeen – Taking a Break

Harry sat bored out of his mind in Defense Against the Dark Arts. It was February and though it was cold outside and currently snowing, all Harry wanted to be doing was flying his Firebolt around. He was sick of classes and lessons. He was sick of studying, and he was sick of the silent treatment Ron was currently giving him for spending too much time in the Library with Hermione. He had plans of skiving off his lesson with Snape that evening – even though he knew Snape would make him regret it – and going to the Quidditch Pitch with Ron. He knew Snape wouldn't be pleased with him, but Harry needed a break.

He'd spent most of the holidays dueling with Snape every day until he couldn't stand. Snape hadn't been the one pushing Harry, Harry had been pushing himself. Voldemort had been silent for far too long and he just knew that things were bound to come to a head between them sometime soon and Harry was determined to win if – when it came to a battle.

Harry was so distracted with his own thoughts that he didn't notice that class had ended until Hermione poked him in the side. Harry looked around to see that everyone was packing up. He smiled sheepishly at Hermione and dropped his book and blank parchment into his bag. He was just about to run after Ron, who had already left the classroom with Dean and Seamus when Remus stopped him.

"Harry, could you please stay after? I'd like a word," Remus said kindly.

Harry looked at Hermione, who was packing up her own things and then turned back to Remus and nodded. "Sure," he said and then turned back to Hermione. "Hermione, could you tell Ron to meet me at the Quidditch Pitch in half an hour?"

"Harry, we have an essay to write for Professor Sinistra," Hermione reminded, glaring at Harry anxiously. Harry winced slightly, Hermione had been looking more and more haggard the last weeks, especially after she'd come back from Christmas break, which Harry was

surprised when she said she was going home for it as the last time she had stayed.

Harry nodded. "I know, we won't be long, I promised Ron after the holidays he could try out the Firebolt and I haven't had the time. I'll get the essay done," Harry said reassuringly. Hermione nodded briskly and then left, taking his word as a promise.

Harry turned back to Remus who was shuffling some papers on his desk. He looked up after a long moment. "Harry, have a seat please."

Harry sat back down at his desk. "Did I do something wrong?" he asked as he tried to think if he had done something wrong that he didn't know about, but he couldn't come up with anything.

"Wrong? No, nothing wrong," Remus said vaguely as he walked over to Harry's desk and leaned against it. "I was just wondering how your extra lessons with Professor Snape are going."

"They're going fine, great actually. I'm learning loads and I can't wait to learn more when I'm his apprentice," Harry said honestly.

"Harry, do you know what it means to be an apprentice to someone?" Remus asked politely, but Harry could detect a slight edge to his voice.

"Of course, Professor Snape can teach me anything he wants without having Ministry or school approval. I can learn well beyond the Hogwarts curriculum, it's an opportunity of a lifetime," Harry said smiling as he remembered Hermione's jealousy as she had said those exact words.

"Harry," Remus said uncertainly with concern in his eyes. "Are you aware that a master and apprentice relationship is much like that of a parent and child relationship?" Remus asked after a moment.

Harry didn't know that, though he had figured that the master and apprentice must share some sort of bond before hand or learning for the apprentice would be near impossible. But Harry didn't have a

problem with that as he already shared a bond with Snape. "I didn't but I guessed as much."

"And you have no problem with that?" questioned Remus.

"No, to be honest, Professor Snape has become the closest thing I've ever had to a father. I trust him with my life."

Remus frowned as he nodded and looked to Harry with concern in his eyes. "What I'm about to tell you isn't to leave this classroom, but I – and Sirius, thought you should know as you're set on being his apprentice," Remus started and Harry frowned as Remus continued rather bluntly. "Severus Snape used to be a Death Eater. He was also a spy for the Order. But before he became a spy he was a loyal follower of the Dark Lord. He was also the one who told the Dark Lord about the Prophecy that led to your parents' deaths," he said solemnly.

Harry looked at Remus for a moment, debating before he said, "I know all of that."

"You know?"

"Yes, and I don't care. Professor Snape may have made some bad choices in the past, but he's making up for them now. Professor Lupin, you can tell Sirius this as well, Severus Snape is a good man, no matter what he's done in the past."

Remus took in a breath and then nodded, though he looked unsure if he believed that for himself.

--

Harry waved to his friends with a smile on his face as they headed off to Hogsmead the next morning and then he bolted back into the school and to the passage of the one-eyed witch. He looked around carefully before he said the password and darted into the passageway. He was in Hogsmead with his hood up on his thick winter cloak, not ten minutes later.

Hermione was slightly disapproving of him being there against the Headmaster's wishes, but even she could see how happy he was to be out of the school. Ron, on the other hand, was all for it. "What no one knows won't hurt him," Ron said as they walked into the three broomsticks.

Harry nodded in agreement and made his way to a waving Fred and George Weasley. "I still don't know how you figured out how to get out of Hogwarts without the map," Fred said as Harry sat down.

"I still can't believe Professor Black caught me with it," George gripped.

"It helps to have an Invisibility Cloak," Ron said on Harry's other side.

"Wish we had one of those," the twins chorused.

"I just have to pray that no one looks too closely at the map and notices I'm gone. I skived off of Professor Snape's lesson last night to go flying with Ron and have been avoiding him all morning; I just know he's going to get me back for it. I love his lessons but even I need a break every once in a while," Harry said as he took one of the mugs of Butterbeer that Lee Jordan had just brought over for the group, and took a large gulp.

"How're those lessons going anyways?" Lee asked from across the table. Most everyone was rather curious about what Harry was being taught, especially because Harry was being rather tight lipped about most of it.

"Great actually, I'm learning loads, though I have to admit that I'm rather board in most of my classes. It seems the only challenging ones are Arithmancy and Runes. I still feel really bad that I had to drop Sirius' class though. It was fun."

"Yes, but you're already ahead of everyone, so there's no point in being in the class," Hermione said after taking a sip of her Butterbeer. "Now if they put you in an upper level class that would be different." For once everyone actually agreed with Hermione as they all nodded their heads.

A short while later, Ron, Hermione, and Harry were walking through Hogsmead on their way to Zonko's when Harry bumped into Draco Malfoy accidentally. "Sorry, Potter," Draco said and continued on his way.

Harry was so baffled by the apology when it had clearly been his fault that he hadn't even noticed that his hood had fallen from his head until he saw Ron and Hermione's eyes widen just before he was grabbed by the arm by a rather irate Severus Snape.

"Potter, what are you doing here?" Snape asked severely.

"Out having a bit of fun..." cheeked Harry but then trailed off at the look in Snape's eyes.

"You do realize that the outskirts of Hogsmead are swarming with Dementors? Never mind that, of course you know. How did you get out of Hogwarts?" Snape asked.

Harry shrugged. "Wouldn't you know, I just walked out the front door," he said nonchalantly, looking Snape in the eyes, it was the first time he'd lied while looking someone in the eyes. He figured if he could do it with Snape then eventually he could do it with Dumbledore. It didn't last long though and Harry's gaze slid off Snape's eyes when the man frowned. "I have permission to be here, Professor. I did get my permission slip signed by my Uncle, true a bit late, but I did. It's not my fault that everyone wants to keep me locked up," Harry said defiantly. He hadn't gone on a Hogsmead visit yet this year only because he had always been kept busy during the time and hadn't thought to get his permission slip signed until Christmas.

Snape's frown deepened. "Yes, well, as you do have permission to be here, I will not say anything, but, Harry," Snape said looking Harry directly in the eyes, Harry's eyes widened slightly when an image was shoved into his mind. "I'd advise you to get back before that mutt of a godfather or yours notices that you're not on his map." Harry gulped and nodded in understanding and Snape started to walk away but turned back with a smirk on his lips. "Oh, I almost forgot. You have a lesson and detention with me tonight for skipping your lesson last

night to go flying with Weasley,” sneered Snape before he walked away robes billowing.

“That went rather well,” Hermione said uncertainly.

“Oh yes, wonderfully well,” Harry said sarcastically. “What you heard Hermione, was Professor Snape letting me off for being here. What I heard is that I have until he gets back to the school to get back myself, and as he’s heading back that way now...”

“I suggest you run, Mate,” said Ron sympathetically.

Harry didn’t need to be told twice and ran, but towards Honey Dukes. It didn’t take him long to get back as he had indeed run the whole way and he was out of breath to prove it. But the look on Snape’s face when a smiling Harry, huffing and puffing, greeted him in the Entrance Hall was priceless.

“How in Slytherin’s name did you get back here so fast?” Snape asked taking in Harry’s heavy breathing, “and without passing me!”

Harry smirked but his smirk vanished when a voice came from behind him and Harry spun around. “I can answer that,” Sirius said coolly from the stairs, a deep frown on his face. “Who told you about the passage way, was it the Weasley twins?” he asked as he crossed his arms over his chest, clearly expecting an answer.

Harry wouldn’t say though, he wasn’t going to get the twins in trouble for something they didn’t do, at least this time. Harry breathed in deeply. “I just want to state that I did nothing wrong here today, I only took a different way out of the school,” Harry said light heartedly, hoping to dispel any lecture that he was more than likely to get.

“Nothing wrong, Harry! You were told that you could not go to Hogsmead for your own protection. What if a Death Eater had captured you? What if the Dementors had gotten to you? None of us would have known until it was too late!” Sirius said as he came to stand in front of Harry, looking at him sternly.



Harry looked at his feet, feeling rather ashamed. Obviously Sirius had worried about him while he was missing from Hogwarts. "I'm sorry, but I needed a break, I needed to have some fun," he said quietly.

"At the expense of your life, Harry!" said Sirius harshly.

"Take it easy, Black, he was in no immediate danger," Snape said placing a hand on Harry's shoulder protectively.

"Snape, stay out of this! This is between me and my godson!" Sirius snapped at the Potion's Master before turning back on Harry. "You have to learn to think about the consequences before you do things, Harry," Sirius said severely.

Harry stiffened at those words, they were like a slap in the face, and tears came unbidden to his eyes, remembering his rash actions in going to the Department of Mysteries. "I know," Harry whispered through clenched teeth, still looking at his feet.

"Do you really, Harry? Then why did you go to Hogsmead today when you were told that you couldn't go?" Sirius asked coolly.

"Because I didn't think –"

"That's exactly it, you didn't think!" Sirius nearly yelled.

Harry couldn't take it anymore and a sob escaped him. Him not thinking had lead to Sirius' death. Him not thinking had him losing the lives of his two best friends. Him not thinking had him chained to a wall and branded by a Death Sphere. Him not thinking had cost him his life! Harry shut his eyes tightly as memory after memory assaulted him and then he opened his eyes again, tears streaming down his cheeks, and looked at Sirius. "I know!" Harry said with a hard edge to his voice and then he pushed passed Sirius and ran out of the entrance hall.

"Harry!" Sirius yelled after him and would have followed but Snape stopped him.

"Leave him alone," Snape said with dead seriousness in his voice.

“Snape, I told you to stay out of this, I will do what I want; he is my godson!” Sirius growled.

“Merlin, Black, couldn’t you see what your words were doing to him? He was already feeling guilty for making you worry; he didn’t need you to make him feel worse! Do you know how long it’s taken me to get him to feel confident in himself? You just shredded that all to hell!” Snape snarled and then stormed after Harry leaving a rather bewildered and ashamed Sirius Black in his wake.

--

When Harry had reached Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom he had cast every locking charm he could think of on the bathroom door. His original intent was to go down into the Chamber but as he had locked himself in the bathroom he had decided against it. He really didn’t want to talk to anyone at the moment. Myrtle had fled after one look from Harry, obviously taking the hint that he wanted to be alone.

That had been three hours ago and Harry hadn’t moved from his spot against the furthest wall of the bathroom since he had collapsed there. There had been several attempts to get into the bathroom, but no one as of yet had managed to get passed his rather powerful locking charms.

Snape had tried first, for almost twenty minutes unsuccessfully, but in the end he had left simply stating that he was here when Harry wanted to talk and a gentle warning not to do anything rash. Harry appreciated it very much, but hadn’t said anything in return. Then came Sirius, Remus, Ron, and Hermione, but out of all of them Sirius had by far been the most persistent and was the one that Harry wanted to talk to the least.

Currently Sirius was still outside the door and Harry was still ignoring him. He just couldn’t deal with him right now. He couldn’t get passed his godfather’s words. He knew that they had been spoken in anger, but to Harry they were more than transparent truth, they were solid fact.

So far Sirius had been politely trying to get Harry to come out, but he was obviously becoming annoyed with Harry's stubbornness. Honestly, Harry didn't know why they hadn't just gotten Dumbledore to open the door. Any locking charm Harry could come up with couldn't possibly stand up against Dumbledore's magic.

"Harry, would you please open this door!" Sirius finally shouted.

"Go away!" Harry snapped. The first words he had spoken since entering the bathroom.

"No, I am not going to go away! I want you to open this door and come out here and talk to me!"

Harry jumped to his feet and started to pace the bathroom. "No," he said clearly to the locked door.

"Harry, this is getting ridiculous. Stop acting like a child and open this door!" Sirius shouted.

Harry narrowed his eyes at the door. That was just it. Harry was a child – was, had been a child. He certainly couldn't claim to be one anymore. His childhood had been taken from him so he could become a savior of his people. Harry suddenly stopped in front of one of the mirrors and slammed his fists into it angrily. He only winced slightly as glass shards embedded into his fists from the now shattered mirror, and blood soaked into his sleeves. All he had ever wanted was to be a normal kid and he knew he'd never be that.

"Harry, Harry, are you alright in there? What's going on?" Sirius called through the door; obviously he had heard the smashing of the mirror.

"I said go away," Harry said deflating some from the pain in his hands as he looked at his bloodied fists and then shook his hands to shake off the pain.

As Harry shook his hands, blood flecked onto a symbol Harry had never seen before, etched into one of the tiles on the floor by the hidden entrance into the Chamber of Secrets. And as it did the symbol began to glow. Harry took a step back and then another. The

last time a symbol that looked like that had glowed he had ended up on the floor sizzling.

Suddenly the symbol stopped glowing and Harry relaxed some as nothing else happened. He shouldn't have relaxed though, because just as he did, the symbol flared to life again and a beam shot from it towards Harry; forming halfway to him into a sword. "Aah!" Harry screamed and managed to side step just in time as the sword embedded itself into the wall right by Harry's head, leaving a shallow cut across the left side of his face.

Harry side glanced at it and then slowly turned his head. "Shit," he swore quite loudly with a half-panicked laugh as he took in Salazar Slytherin's jewel handled Scimitar.

"Harry, are you all right? Open the door!" Snape called with concern in his voice as he rattled the door handle.

"Move," Harry heard Remus say and then the door burst open and Sirius, Snape, Remus, and Dumbledore all rushed in.

They took in, first the smashed mirror, and then Harry standing against the wall with bloody hands and blood running down his cheek; not to mention, the sword just beside his head. "I'm okay," Harry said shakily stepping away from the sword that had once killed him. "Almost got decapitated by that sword though," Harry said quietly, glancing at the sword and then as he really hadn't taken a breath since the sword had shot at him he promptly fainted.

A/N: Don't look at me like that; you'd faint too with that kind of scare, hehe.

## Chapter Eighteen – The Best Laid Plans of Weasley's and Potter's

"Harry, why not destroy the Horcruxes you have?" Snape asked as he watched the boy place another vial of Basilisk venom on the top shelf of a glass windowed cabinet that also contained three of the four Horcruxes Harry currently had in his possession. He'd started to leave them locked up in the Chamber of Secrets after Hermione had asked about Riddle's diary in second year; he didn't want to take the chance of accidentally misplacing one of the Horcruxes and then it possessing someone.

It had been several weeks since the freak attack from Salazar's Scimitar had occurred. The cursed sword had been promptly confiscated by Dumbledore with the excuse that "it could be cursed." Harry had no doubt; it had once killed him and then nearly taken his head off! That didn't mean that he didn't want the bleeding sword back though. It had also helped him in the past.

Harry and Snape were in Salazar's chamber for Harry's training session. Harry had chosen the chamber on part because he wanted to take care of getting the venom from Mortedolv and also because he was currently avoiding Sirius. They had gotten in another row, this one, to Harry's mortification, in front of his friends. Harry knew that his godfather didn't mean to set him off, but it just seemed that there was nothing the man could say anymore that didn't make Harry think about his past. Snape had on several occasions relayed just how he felt about Harry's increasingly more confused and frustrated godfather.

Harry turned around to face the potions master after closing the cabinet door. "Voldemort told me that he had a secondary plan when he died. I can only assume that after Hermione, Ron, and I had destroyed the first couple of Horcruxes that he created another, one I wouldn't know about." Harry sat down on the couch in the sitting room of Salazar's chamber. "Mort and I have been discussing this," Harry said as he motioned to the shrunken basilisk currently filling another couple vials with venom. "At the final battle Voldemort had Salazar's Scimitar. When I used it and Godric's sword to make myself more powerful, I had to fracture my soul to do it. Unlike with the Horcruxes that requires a blood sacrifice, I did it with blood magic, using my own

blood. A piece of my soul went into both swords. I had thought Salazar's sword was destroyed not long after I had done the ritual. So you can imagine my shock when I saw he had it. Godric's sword had been destroyed the same day I... I killed Ginny –"

"You didn't kill Ginny, the Dark Lord killed Ginny," Snape interrupted firmly.

Harry only shook his head and continued; he'd never believe that. "Mort and I believe that Voldemort may have turned Salazar's sword into a Horcrux. I can't be entirely certain, but I'm pretty sure I cut the sword in half before I died. I'm not sure if that meant that I destroyed the sword or not, but I think because our souls were still intact, that is what allowed us to come back, though I'm still not sure how we ended up in the past," Harry explained with a deep sigh. "I don't know how much you know about Horcruxes, Professor, but Voldemort had seven, including himself. I don't think it's possible for more than that to exist at one time."

"So you believe that if you were to destroy the Horcruxes now, that he'd simply make another, one you didn't know about," Snape said in understanding.

Harry nodded. "Yes. I prefer to destroy all of them at once, hopefully without giving Voldemort enough time to make another," Harry said as he knelt down to take another vial from Mort to place in the cabinet.

"Careful with that, Harry," Mort hissed as Harry capped the vial. "If you get that on any cuts you will be dead in less than a minute."

"I know," Harry nodded, chuckling a bit as he placed the vial into the cabinet beside the other two. "Curious though, is there a cure for Basilisk venom, other than Phoenix tears of course."

"Phoenix tears can cure Basilisk venom? I did not know that, how did you come about this information?" Mort asked curiously.

Harry cringed slightly, he hadn't yet actually told the serpent fully about what had happened his first second year. He looked away from the Basilisk before answering. "You sort of... umm... bit me, once."

Mort blinked at him. "As I do not remember this, I assume I did this while being controlled by Tom?" Harry nodded, looking back at the serpent. "I apologize then. Did I give you an immunity bite when I bit you?"

"What's an immunity bite?" Harry asked.

"An immunity bite would make you immune from any kind of snake venom, only a magical serpent can grant an immunity bite."

Harry shook his head. "I wouldn't know. I had never been bitten by a snake after that. Could you give me an immunity bite now?" Harry asked curiously.

"I could, but I would then lose my life," Mortedolv answered gravely.

"Oh," Harry said in English, as he looked at his feet, he hadn't expected that answer and now he felt ashamed for asking.

"What is it, Harry," Snape asked as he saw the boy's complexion pale slightly.

Harry shook his head. "It's nothing, Mortedolv was explaining an immunity bite to me," Harry explained. "I don't want an immunity bite then, Mort. I don't want to see you die," Harry added in Parseltongue. The serpent nodded.

--

The next afternoon, Harry was walking a few steps behind Hermione and Ron down to lunch when he abruptly disappeared. Ron and Hermione both looked behind them as they heard Harry's yelp before he vanished.

"Where'd Harry go?" Ron asked.

Hermione stared down the hall blinking in perplexity. She shook her head. "I don't know, he was just behind us," she said.

Not a half a second later and Harry reappeared, startling Ron. "Sorry, Mate. I'm starving!" Harry said with a smile and then pulled his two friends onward to lunch, plans already formulating in his mind.

Ron and Hermione kept giving Harry strange looks during lunch, as he kept rubbing his hands together as if in anticipation, but stopped when they finally glared at him. A few minutes later and the trio were heading down to Potions when again Harry disappeared, in the same spot.

"Well this is ridiculous, where'd he go now?" Hermione asked as she looked up and down the hall.

Ron shrugged. "Maybe he learned to Apparate."

"Honestly, Ronald, haven't you read Hogwarts a History? You can't Apparate inside Hogwarts," Hermione said huffily.

Ron opened his mouth to retaliate when Harry suddenly reappeared again. "What are you guys standing here for? Have you forgotten? We have Potions." Ron and Hermione both stared after Harry as he quickly continued on his way as if nothing had happened. Harry turned back to the two. "If we don't hurry, we're going to be late!" The two looked at each other, shrugged and then followed after their friend.

Potions was rather uneventful, but Harry's two best friends continued to give him strange looks. Especially when he suddenly raised his hand. "Professor Snape, I think my dittany has gone bad, is there anymore?"

"In my personal stores, there's a jar, touch nothing else," Snape said in a distracted tone as he read over first year essays with a look of disgust on his face.

Harry returned a few minutes later with fresh dittany and Hermione could have sworn she had seen pink dust on his hands before he wiped them clean. Harry had a smug look on his face as he continued to brew his flawless potion.



After potions they had Transfiguration and again as they past the same spot, Harry disappeared, returning a minute later as if nothing had happened and urging his perplexed friends onward to class. "Come on, McGonagall will skin us alive if we're late."

Hermione sat down next to Harry, determined to get answers, but Professor McGonagall started class before she had a chance to ask, and not three minutes into class, moved Harry back to sit next to Malfoy. What came even stranger to Hermione and Ron was that Harry seemed to get along with the blond Slytherin through the entire class. There wasn't a single argument or snide remark.

As soon as class let out, Hermione and Ron cornered Harry before he could go down to dinner. "Ok, Mate, what is going on?" Ron asked.

"What do you mean? You know we're going to be late for dinner," Harry said calmly.

"Who cares if we're late for dinner, Harry, why have you been disappearing all afternoon?" Hermione asked, sounding a bit stressed.

"Disappearing? I haven't been disappearing, at least not anymore than normal," Harry cheeked but then his smirk turned into a frown. "Hermione are you all right, you're looking a little stressed," Harry asked.

The frazzled Witch opened her mouth to comment, but Ron beat her to it. "Mate, really, what's going on?"

"What do you mean?" Harry asked again and then looked down at his watch. "Come on you two, dinner, remember?" And Harry pushed his friends onward.

The two walked in front of Harry until he again disappeared in the same exact spot as the last few times. Hermione threw up her arms in frustration. "Whatever! I'm going to dinner," she announced and stalked off. Ron stood there for a moment looking after her before shaking his head and following.

A few minutes later and Harry ran into the Great Hall a bit late for dinner. Fred and George Weasley directly behind him. The three slid into their seats and promptly shoveled food onto their plates and into their mouths. Ron, Ginny, and Hermione watched on as the three quickly devoured half their plates of food in record time. Hermione opened her mouth as if to ask what was going on when a loud crash and a yell was heard.

The three boys eyes widened and promptly dived under the table as Severs Snape came storming into the Great Hall. The hall was eerily silent for all of two seconds and then the first snort of laughter was heard before the entire hall erupted into laughter, even the professors couldn't help but laugh.

Snape was covered from head to foot in bright neon pink slime. His robes were covered and streaks ran through his hair and dripped into his face and from his crooked nose. The man stood there looking as dignified as the situation would allow as he looked up and down the Gryffindor tables and took out his wand. "Accio Harry Potter," he said quite clearly.

A thud and then a yelp was heard before Harry was magically dragged out from under the table. He scraped at the stone floor with his hands all the way until he was at Snape's feet. Harry jumped to his knees and looked up to Snape, trying to keep a straight face while at the same time looking utterly fearful. "Please have mercy on my soul. It wasn't meant for you," Harry pleaded in a whispery voice as he was trying not to laugh.

Snape raised a pink eyebrow. "Accio Fred Weasley, Accio George Weasley."

Two more thuds and two more yelps came from under the Gryffindor table before Fred and George too were magically dragged out and deposited at Snape's feet. Fred was the first to scramble to his knees beside Harry, George quickly followed. "I can't believe I'm going to say this, but we really didn't mean too!" Fred nodded frantically beside his brother. "Please, please don't hurt us!"

"It was meant for Mrs. Norris and Filch if we were lucky; don't kill us," Harry said, cowering behind his raised hands.

Meanwhile the Great Hall was in complete uproar. Snape glared up at the hall, which abruptly fell silent, even the teachers, and then did the most unexpected thing ever, he laughed. Not just a small chuckle, no a full boom of laughter came from the man. Everyone in the Great Hall looked on in shock as Snape doubled over in his laughter. After a moment he took in a deep breath and straightened and composed himself and then looked down at the three shocked and cowering teens.

"You three all have detention with me for a month," he growled and the three all gulped and then nodded slowly. Snape smirked and then turned on his heels to leave the eerily silent hall. He stopped just before the doors and looked down at Harry who hadn't even attempted to remove himself from his kneeling position. "And Potter, if the pink doesn't come out in one wash, you can add another month onto your sentence. I know it was you who took the pixy dust from my lab." Harry cringed and nodded as Snape swept from the hall.

The hall remained silent as the three turned to look at each other. "Well," said George, standing and brushing himself off. "The prank worked perfectly."

"Right you are brother mine," Fred agreed as he also stood and shook his brother's hand. "We just have to work out a few kinks."

"Like making the slime harden and the color brighter," Harry inserted, following the other two to his feet. "But we did learn a very valuable lesson here today," Harry added when he saw Dumbledore looking at them amusedly.

"And what would that be, Mr. Potter?" McGonagall asked from her position at the head table, her expression too looked amused.

The three boys looked at each other and then as one looked back up to their head of house. "Never hide under the table," they said in unison and rubbed the same sore spot on the back of their heads. McGonagall simply shook her head and chuckled.

“At least he was kind enough to not take house points,” Dumbledore said softly, though the hall heard him.

“FIFTY POINTS FROM GRYFFINDOR!” Snape’s voice suddenly boomed over the Great Hall and Harry, Fred, and George, ducked and looked around each other fearfully. No one had noticed the black owl leaving the Howler.

A/N: Needed a bit of a laugh.

## Chapter Nineteen – The Death Sphere

It was the day after the last day of exams and Harry and Hermione were both very relieved to be done with them as they entered into the Great Hall for a rather late breakfast. Harry was more so relieved because it meant an end to his detentions. The slime took several washes to come out.

The two had slept in as they had no more studying to do before classes. Harry and Hermione had both decided that after breakfast they were finally going to reveal to a rather perplexed Ronald Weasley just why they had been in such a hurry all school year.

But the two quickly realized that they were going to have to find their friend to do so as he wasn't at breakfast as they had thought he would be. Harry sat down and started pulling food toward him, while Hermione did the same, both unconcerned knowing they'd find Ron eventually.

"Where do you suppose we'll find Ron?" Hermione asked before taking a bite of toast.

"I don't know, I thought he would be here," Harry replied as he grabbed some toast from the table. "He's probably with Seamus and Dean, or maybe Fred and George finally decided to actually do what they've been threatening to do for months now," Harry chuckled.

"What's that?"

"Use him as a prank test subject of course," Harry laughed.

Hermione chucked and started in on her breakfast as she glanced down the table toward the teachers. "Has Professor Dumbledore found out any more information on where Salazar's Scimitar came from?" Hermione asked quietly after a while of looking up at Dumbledore, who was conversing quietly with Professor McGonagall.

Harry shook his head and ran his fingers absentmindedly over the thin white scar on his left cheek, thinking about the sword that had

been taken by Dumbledore months ago. He really had hoped that he could have hidden it before someone had seen it, but he hadn't expected the thing to come out of the floor and try and kill him. By the time he had come back around, Dumbledore had it securely in his holding. At least he knew where it was, unlike the other two founders objects. He knew Godric's sword was here in the school, just not where, and Helga Hufflepuff's chalice could really be anywhere at this point, probably in Voldemort's holding along with the ring and Nagini. At least he had the other four Horcruxes.

"He says he's still researching, but honestly I think he doesn't want to believe that my blood summoned it," Harry said after he took a gulp of pumpkin juice, thinking about the implications of that.

"You do realize what that would mean if it did? It would mean that you're a descendant of Salazar Slytherin," Hermione stated and then giggled. "Wouldn't that just be irony; a descendant of Slytherin in Gryffindor."

Harry laughed at that as well but abruptly stopped as a scream rang from the entrance to the Great Hall. Harry stood up, instantly drawing his wand. What he saw made his heart nearly stop beating.

Peter Pettigrew held Ron by the throat as he pointed his wand at his head like a Muggle gun. "Where is Harry Potter?" the traitorous rat demanded of the hall. Students backed away in a panic and looked at Pettigrew fearfully as teachers stood from the staff table and started to move forward cautiously.

Harry darted forward between the tables without hesitation, his eyes not wavering from the traitor's. "I'm right here, Pettigrew!" Harry said in a deadly voice that seemed to reverberate around the hall and made everyone stare at him. "Drop my friend now and perhaps I might give you over to the Dementors," Harry growled dangerously, his wand pointed at the man, the tip already glowing a deadly green. Pettigrew looked deranged as he looked at Harry and then the Head Table where the teachers were trying to find a way to intervene without getting anyone killed.

Peter looked back at Harry. "Potter, where are the Horcruxes?" he demanded tightening his grip on Ron's throat. Ron was already turning a slight shade of blue as he tried to claw at Pettigrew's hand around his throat.

"Let him go!" Harry demanded, his wand never leaving Pettigrew, he wasn't giving any quarter to this man.

"No, I don't think so. I think the three of us are going to go for a little walk until we happen upon my Lord's Horcruxes." Pettigrew said dangerously as he pulled Ron closer to him, glancing again at the teachers.

"I don't know what you're talking about!" Harry shouted with anger in his voice as he tried to find a way to free his friend without harming him in the process.

His solution presented itself in the form of Hermione. While Peter had his focus on Harry, she cast a stinging hex at the hand holding Ron and Peter dropped him. Ron coughed and gasp for air as he rubbed his throat and Remus quickly summoned him out of the way. As soon as Ron was out of range, Harry sent what appeared to be the Killing Curse, wordlessly, but it was proven not so as it was deflected by a shield Pettigrew hadn't cast.

Harry's eyes widened and then darted to the entrance of the Great Hall. The last time a shield had suddenly appeared around a Death Eater, namely Bellatrix; it had been Voldemort who had cast it. Peter suddenly laughed and turned into the rat before any more spells could be fired and scurried towards the doors.

"Get him!" Harry shouted as he ran after the rat without thinking.

"Harry!" Snape shouted as he followed after Harry.

Harry kept casting spells but they just missed their mark as Pettigrew was quite quick in his rat form and scurried down the stairs so fast that Harry found it hard to catch up, but catch up he did, just as Peter scurried through the open Entrance Hall doors. Harry didn't even think as to why they were open before he raced down into the

Entrance Hall; Snape came out of the Great Hall, yelling his name to stop him, Sirius and Remus not so far behind.

Harry'd just gotten down to the bottom of the stairs before he stopped as if hitting a wall as a voice boomed, "Stigmatis de Tempusoris!"

Time seemed to almost stop as Harry screamed and clamped his hands over his chest. A hooded figure let out a hollow laugh as he stepped into the Entrance Hall calmly. Held in a white boney hand was an all too familiar fire red sphere. Harry instantly knew who it was, but for the life of him, couldn't figure out how he had gotten through the wards.

"Voldemort!" seethed Harry angrily, gasping for breath and trying to straighten even with the pain in his chest and started to back slowly up the stairs.

The Dark Lord laughed again. "In the flesh – well, bone so to speak. I see you can say my name again, boy, we'll have to change that," Voldemort said almost silkily. Harry raised his wand but before he could loose a spell Voldemort laughed darkly and a pulsing glow came to the Death Sphere. "Stigmatis de Mortis," Voldemort hissed and the sphere pulsed again and Harry doubled over, a strangled scream coming from his throat as his wand slipped from his fingers.

"Sigillum de Parcaearum," Voldemort hissed again. The next pulse was even brighter then the last and sent Harry to his knees as another scream was ripped from his throat again and memories started to flood his mind.

"You're weak, boy!" Voldemort laughed as he raised his wand, "Crucio!"

Harry used his Occlumency training to push passed the horrifying memories and grasped his wand from the floor as he dodged the Cruciatu Curse just as it was about to hit him. "No, Voldemort," seethed Harry as he gasped for breath and lifted his head and pushed himself to his feet. "Not this time. Accio Sphere," Harry shouted hoarsely to summon the sphere.



Voldemort hadn't been expecting it and grasped at air as the sphere soared into Harry's hand. "NO!" he screamed angrily.

As soon the sphere touched Harry's hand he could feel the brand on his chest start to pulse and darkness seemed to seep into his eyes as they blazed with fire. Harry smirked and raised the sphere himself and focused on Voldemort and all his hatred of the man. "Stigmatis de Tempusoris!" Harry shouted and the sphere pulsed and Voldemort staggered back slightly.

"You dare use my weapon against me, boy!" Voldemort gasped and raised his wand. "Avada Kedavra!" The green light of the Killing Curse sped towards Harry but Harry didn't even think to move as he threw the sphere into its path. An explosion was the result and Harry found himself thrown off his feet by the shock wave and nearly knocked unconscious by the impact. When he dizzily looked up next, Voldemort was standing over him looking down at him from under his hood. What Harry saw sent fear coursing through him. Voldemort had no face; it was just a white skull with two glowing red eyes.

"You're mine!" Voldemort hissed and grabbed Harry and they disappeared.

"Harry!" Snape yelled as he and Sirius ran down the stairs too late.

--

Harry's head swam as he slowly opened his eyes. He ached all over and as he looked around his breath hitched in his throat. They were in a very familiar cemetery, and he used them, as the Dark Lord, or rather the skeleton of the Dark Lord, and Pettigrew were there with him. Harry tried not to move so he wouldn't be noticed as he thought of a way to get himself out of this situation.

He was tied to Tom Riddle Senior's grave just as he had been the last time he was in the Little Hangleton Cemetery and Harry doubted he would be untied this time and given back his wand. Harry stared up at the cloaked skeleton as the Dark Lord spun around, a knife gleaming in the hazy afternoon sunlight from his skeletal hand.

A hollow laugh came from the hood as Riddle approached and Harry stiffened as a skeletal hand drew back the hood. "Well, Potter, this looks so familiar, doesn't it?"

Harry swallowed his fear as he looked up into the red dots that were the Dark Lord's eyes. "I don't know, as I recall Wormtail was the one with the knife the last time and you were no more than a disgusting, shriveled ugly baby!"

Nothing was said to that; the Dark Lord simply strode forward and stabbed Harry in the abdomen. Harry gasped out in pain as the blade pierced his right side just below his rib cage and then was pulled out and blood quickly started to soak Harry's robes. "That wound will eventually kill you, but not before you see me arise to full glory, and maybe if you beg I will have mercy on you and kill you quickly," he whispered harshly and then strode over to the large cauldron set up not too far away. "Wormtail," he called and Pettigrew walked forward with his wand out as the Dark Lord handed over the bloody knife before he disrobed showing his entire skeletal body and stepped into the large cauldron. Wormtail placed the knife on a nearby grave.

"Bone of the father, unknowingly given, you will renew your son!"

Harry stifled a whimper of pain as the ground beneath his feet cracked, releasing the dust that had once been Riddle's bones. He could feel his own blood now soaking his right pant leg and sweat had appeared on his forehead.

"Flesh of the servant – willing given y-you will revive your master."

Harry stared as Pettigrew slashed off his own hand with an anguished scream and then tossed the hand with the missing finger into the cauldron. He stood there panting for a long moment before he retrieved a vial from within his robes and walked up to the now heavily panting Harry.

Harry seethed as the vial was pressed against his wound. "I-I'll kill you one day, W-Wormtail," Harry hissed. Pettigrew hastily retreated.

"B-blood of the enemy... forcibly taken, you will resurrect your foe."

Pettigrew breathed heavily and held his arm against him, halting his own loss of blood, as he poured Harry's blood into the cauldron and quickly stepped back, collapsing against a gravestone.

Harry closed his eyes concentrating hard, through the pain in his abdomen, through the pain in his scar, on the dagger with his blood on it that had been left unattended. His eyes shot open to see nothing but white steam just as he felt his magic wrap around the dagger. Harry prayed to God, Fate, whoever would listen, that he hit the ropes and not himself.

Harry's prayers were answered as he heard a dull thud and the ropes loosened. Harry bit his lip in pain as he slid down the grave just as the Dark Lord stepped from the cauldron, Wormtail by his side in an instant with his robes. Harry grasped at the gold chain around his neck, just as the now flesh and robed figure turned on him, and disappeared.

Harry landed on his knees in the Entrance Hall of Hogwarts just minutes after the Dark Lord and himself had disappeared. He hadn't had much time to think about how far back to turn the hourglass and had turned it twice. Lucky he did because attention was on him immediately and he needed the attention desperately.

"Harry!" he heard Snape yell.

Harry put a hand to the wound on his abdomen and blood seeped over his fingers, his robes no longer even stanching the blood. "P-Professor, help me," Harry gasped.

"Dear God!" Dumbledore exclaimed as he hurried down the stairs after Snape. Sirius, Remus, and several other staff members following, including Madam Pomfrey who pushed passed everyone to get to Harry.

Harry smiled slightly as the Medi-Witch went directly to work on him. "I-I'm sorry," he whispered. "I r-really did try to stay out of the H-hospital Wing this year." At that Harry promptly passed out, falling into Snape's arms.

--

Hermione sat on the edge of Harry's bed in the Hospital Wing. "You are very lucky that you suggested the Entrance Hall as the preset destination for the Time Turners," she said, squeezing his hand.

"I'm lucky I only had enough time to turn the hourglass twice. Anymore time then that and there probably wouldn't have been anyone in the Entrance Hall and I would have bled to death before someone noticed me," Harry said quietly squeezing his friends hand back.

"Please don't say that, Harry," Hermione whispered tears coming to her eyes and Harry held onto her hand more firmly.

"What I want to know," Ron said with a raspy voice, from where he was sitting on the bed next to them. "Is why I didn't get to use a Time Turner too?"

"I already told you, Ronald, we only got them because we were taking so many classes," Hermione huffed.

"Yeah, I don't get that either. Hermione, you I can understand, but Harry, you're not much for studying and stuff, or you never used to be, why would you want to take more classes? Isn't Snape's extra lessons enough?" Ron ranted but Harry never got a chance to answer as the Hospital Wing doors opened and several staff members entered.

Harry tried with difficulty to sit up a bit, but his stomach was still very tender in the area of the stab wound and with a small gasp he settled back on his pillows. Hermione heard the gasp and looked at him with concern in her eyes; as did Lupin, who had heard the near silent gasp with his more sensitive hearing. Harry smiled at Hermione slightly and she frowned back at him. But the exchange was broken by Sirius who quietly asked his two friends to leave.

Harry watched his friends go, not knowing why they had been kicked out, but his attention was brought back to Sirius. "Harry, how are you feeling," he asked lightly as he sat on the edge of Harry's bed.

"Fine," Harry said and then added at the look that everyone seemed to give him. "A bit sore still, but I'm mending."

"That is good, my boy," Dumbledore said with a serious edge to his voice as he conjured a plush armchair and settled down into it. Here it was. It had already been a few hours and yet, no one had questioned him on what had happened; it didn't help that he had been unconscious for some of that time. They only knew that he had used the Time Turner as his way back. "Now, if you could be so kind as to tell us exactly what happened, as you are the only one who knows all of it."

Harry let out a heavy breath. "Vol –" Harry nearly yelled out as pain laced down his spine and forced his muscles to tense around his wound. Everyone looked at him with worry in their eyes as he clamped his eyes shut and nearly bit down on his tongue. Evidently the Dark Lord had reactivated his curse scar while he was unconscious. "He," Harry amended heavily, opening his eyes. "Is back; he took my blood and got his body back."

There was a shocked silence that followed his words and both Remus and Snape sat down heavily on the bed next to him.

"The Order must be informed. The Minister must be informed –"

"No!" both Snape and Harry said immediately. Dumbledore looked at the two curiously.

"I don't believe that is wise, Albus. The likelihood of Fudge believing you is very slim. It would be much more prudent for him to find out on his own."

"You think so, Severus? But the population needs to know about the danger they are in." Dumbledore insisted.

“Has the Minister not always denied the possibility of the Dark Lord’s return? Has he not always laughed at you for believing it? If you were to make a statement of his return, Fudge will simply counter you and call you a fool. Your name will be dragged through the mud by the Prophet and no one would believe you. I’m not suggesting we do nothing,” Snape said as he held up his hand to forestall anyone’s argument. “I’m only suggesting that we let the Dark Lord oust himself. At some point, there is no doubt; he will come for Harry again. In the meantime we’ll give Harry the best protection we can.”

Dumbledore silently contemplated Snape’s reasoning and Harry waited with his breath held. He really didn’t want to see another year like his fifth year. Especially with Hogwarts hosting the Tri-Wizard Tournament the next school year.

“Very well, Severus, you are correct about Cornelius. I would like to alert the Order however and I would like you to resume your duties –”

“I can’t,” Snape cut Dumbledore off. “I gave Harry an oath after I revealed to him my past.”

“Severus, you promised me in exchange –”

“I gave you an oath that I would protect Harry.” Snape yet again cut the Headmaster off, who looked at him with irritation. “And I am,” Snape said looking Dumbledore in the eyes.

“You don’t seem to be doing a very good job of it,” Sirius said darkly.

Harry looked at his godfather and rolled his eyes. “I think he’s doing a great job, I’d be dead several times over if it weren’t Professor Snape,” Harry said heatedly.

“Harry besides V – him taking your blood and gaining his body back, what else happened while you were gone?” Dumbledore suddenly asked, staving off any further arguments.

Harry shook his head and looked at Dumbledore. “I don’t know. I woke up tied to Riddle Senior’s grave. The Dark Lord stabbed me

before Pettigrew started the ritual to get his body back. I really hadn't been conscious for more than ten minutes. Why?"

Dumbledore seemed to hesitate for a moment before he reached for Harry's left arm and pushed back the sleeve on his pajama top. Harry let him as he knew where this was going the moment the old wizard had reached for his arm. Dumbledore turned his arm over so Harry could see the Dark Mark and could see that it obviously wasn't new as his blood curse scar ran over the dark tattoo. Harry looked down at it, trying to show that he was shocked to see it, but he could only manage to blink at his arm.

"You already knew this was here," Dumbledore stated gravely, taking in Harry's lack of response. Everyone looked at Harry sharply after Dumbledore's words, including Snape, probably to see what Harry was going to come up with for a response.

"I –" Harry stopped himself, he was going to lie, but he couldn't come up with anything. They'd know he was lying because he couldn't look at them and lie. Harry took in a deep breath and looked up at the headmaster. "Yes."

Dumbledore stared back at Harry as the others remained silent. "How and when?"

Harry straightened himself up in bed, ignoring the soreness from the stab wound as he tried to think of a lie that would be truth enough. "I woke up with it, the summer before second year." That was truth enough.

Dumbledore stared hard at Harry, obviously finding fault in his answer as he thought back to the beginning of second year. "You didn't have it your second year." Dumbledore stated.

"I did, when the Dark Lord attacked my mind at the beginning of second year, I had it under a glamour," Harry said calmly, it was true, just wasn't cast by him. "You remember at the beginning of this year, I refused to remove my shirt?" Dumbledore nodded and understanding blossomed in Sirius' eyes. "The Weasley twins hadn't tested any prank on me."

Dumbledore's eyes hardened as he turned to look at Snape. "You knew about this." It wasn't a question.

Snape nodded. "I knew. Harry was forced to tell me when I discovered it. He didn't want to tell anyone else –"

"I was afraid," Harry cut in trembling slightly from the pain of sitting up so long. "I thought you'd all hate me," he whispered as he looked down at his hands.

"We don't hate you, Harry. Obviously you are not at fault for this," Sirius consoled him.

"No you are not to blame," Dumbledore stated. "I'm glad you were at least able to share this with Severus, though you should have come to me." Harry nodded. "There is one more thing I think you should see, as I do not want you to be startled when you do see it."

Dumbledore banished Harry's shirt entirely, this mark at least looked new. Harry let out a shaky breath as he looked down at the Death Mark that he was surprised wasn't killing him at the moment. After all he had just been branded for a second time.

A/N: Onward to year four!



## Chapter Twenty – Before the World Cup

Dudley and Harry waved goodbye to Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon. It had taken a few hours of persuasion on Dudley's part, but after hearing about Quidditch from Harry, he was set on going to the World Cup to see the Wizarding sport for himself. Harry had no objections, he and Dudley had become rather good friends through letters during the previous school year and the summer holidays at Privet Drive, and he was happy that his cousin was taking an interest. It was Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon who had to be convinced. They were worried about their son getting involved in the Wizarding World.

But Dudley was very persuasive and so Mr. Weasley had picked the two up in his thankfully very Muggle looking car the day before the game. The boys turned back to look at Mr. Weasley as he spoke. "Now, boys we're going to be taking a Portkey to the World Cup stadium. Harry, I know you've used a Portkey before, but Dudley it may seem a bit strange to you. But that's magic for you," Mr. Weasley chuckled.

"Harry's told me about Portkeys, Mr. Weasley," Dudley said politely.

"I told him about all magical transportation when he came with Remus, Sirius and me to Diagon Alley," Harry explained.

Just a week ago, Sirius and Remus had shown up on the doorstep of Number Four Privet Drive wanting to take Harry to get his school supplies. Harry had actually been hesitant to go. He hadn't wanted his cousin to see him get in a row with Sirius should the man inadvertently say something that would make Harry upset.

Harry at first had tried to block out Sirius' hurtful words, it wasn't Sirius' fault after all, but he couldn't, so had taken to avoiding the man and any situation that might bring about him saying anything. Even Sirius' letters sometimes sent Harry into his memories and he had to take a couple days to reply to them. Harry felt really guilty because Sirius' had no idea Harry kept getting so upset with him.

Dudley and he had been intensely in the middle of playing a video game on his PlayStation in the living room and Dudley had timidly

asked to go and then whined and begged jokingly. Remus and Sirius had been a little nervous about taking him at first, but then relented when Harry had started to beg too. It was childish moments like those that Harry had missed out on in his childhood and so took every opportunity for them. Besides it was amusing to see the adults cave to him for a change.

By the time they had arrived in Ottery St. Catchpole the sun was setting on the horizon. Harry had been really surprised when the door opened to the Burrow and not only did the Weasley family and Hermione come out to greet him, but also so did Sirius, Remus, and Professor Snape. Harry nearly jumped out of the car before it stopped, giving Mrs. Weasley a near heart attack. Harry just grinned sheepishly at the stern looks he got from the adults before he introduced Dudley to the whole lot.

Once everyone was inside and seated for a special Weasley dinner, Harry finally brought up the questions he'd had since they had arrived. "Professor Snape," Harry said and waited for the man to look up from his dinner. "Not that I'm not happy to see you, but what are you doing here?" he asked, already knowing the reason, but he could tell his friends, well the Weasley kids anyways, were dying to ask.

"Did you really think that I was going to leave it up to the Mutt and Wolf to make sure you are safe from the Dark Lord if he should make yet another attempt on your life during the Quidditch Cup?" Snape asked dryly though there was a hint of amusement in his voice. "Besides I have a bet on the match."

Harry scoffed and nodded. "Thought so," he said. "So how much did you bet on the match, Professor?" Harry asked after a moment.

"I've got a hefty sum on the Irish," Snape replied to the astonishment of Mrs. Weasley, who glared at the potions master.

"Good call, Professor. I, myself set up a large sum through Gringotts. Those goblins certainly like to gambol, they were ecstatic when I asked to place such a specialized bet," Harry said with a smug smile on his face.

"Not you too," Mrs. Weasley huffed, but was quickly ignored when Fred and George spoke over her.

"So Harry, what is this specialized bet?" George asked inquisitively.

"And how did you come about this sure bet that you would risk your inheritance on?" Fred asked.

Harry smirked as the adults looked at him curiously and some with disapproval. Sirius was obviously trying to feign disapproval for Mrs. Weasley's benefit, but Harry saw through it and winked at him. "Well, I've been looking at the stats over the last year and the way I see it Ireland is going to win hands down," the twins started to voice their agreements, but Harry held up his hand. "However, Bulgaria's Seeker, Viktor Krum is absolutely masterful. I bet Krum will catch the Snitch, but Ireland will still win."

"I agree with, Harry," Hermione suddenly said. "According to the statistics it's a very high probability. And if he knows what's good for him, Krum had better catch the Snitch because I have a lot of galleons riding on him." The lot of them, except Dudley who didn't know Hermione very well, all stared at her with disbelief in their eyes. "What?" she asked. "Oh come on, according to the stats its practically a sure bet, I might as well make some money off of it."

"Dad," George asked suddenly. "Do we have time to go to Gringotts?"

"If Hermione is betting on something, then there can't be any doubt," Fred reasoned for his brother.

"Absolutely not!" screeched Mrs. Weasley.

"If you get up extra early tomorrow morning, I'll side along Apparate one of you to Diagon Alley," Mr. Weasley said in an almost whispery voice as he leaned in conspiratorially to his sons.

"Make sure to place a bet for me as well, would you dad?" Percy suddenly said and Mrs. Weasley looked scandalized.

"I give up," she suddenly said and put her head in her hand.

Ginny pat her mother on the shoulder consolingly. "Don't worry, Mum, I'm not going to gambol, and neither is Ron for the same reason as mine."

"And what's that, Ginny dear," Mrs. Weasley asked looking up hopefully to her two youngest.

"We're both broke," Ron said morosely as he leaned his head on his hand. Ginny nodded in agreement.

Mrs. Weasley rolled her eyes and shook her head. "Well don't come crying back to me when you all lose for betting on the same exact thing."

"Don't worry, Mum, we won't, because this is a sure bet, especially if Hermione is betting on it!" Fred remarked enthusiastically. Everyone else laughed.

--

Harry was more than glad that Dumbledore had managed to provide a second Portkey to the World Cup match. They certainly had more people this time around and it was cramped trying to hang onto the Portkey then. Harry was certain that this time they wouldn't have all fit. The landing was a bit smoother too; Harry, however still managed to land on his backside.

"Graceful, Harry," Snape remarked with a smirk on his face and held out his hand to help him up.

"Yeah, well Portkeys have it in for me," Harry grumbled as he took Snape's hand and pulled himself up, and then glared at his snickering cousin who had somehow managed to land on his feet.

After they had split up with Cedric Diggory and his father, and getting past Mr. Roberts and finding their campsite, they began setting up their tents. Dudley was more than surprised at the odd tents they had passed, but he took it in stride at Mr. Weasley's remark of, "Always the same. We can't resist showing off when we get together."

While Mr. Weasley, Ron, Fred, and George began to try and figure out how to set up their tent, Harry and the others stood back and looked at Snape. Snape had a sly smirk on his face as he pulled out two circular objects about a foot and a half in size from his pack, and handed one to Harry. Harry took it and placed it on the ground and then he pulled the cord on top and stood back. There was a 'thwamp' sound and then the entire tent sprung open and up, all that had to be done was staking in into the ground. It wasn't much bigger than a dome tent but had been magically enhanced inside.

The Weasley's all stared. "Amazing what Muggles come up with isn't it," Harry remarked and Dudley laughed as he produced his own, as did Hermione.

Harry couldn't help telling Hermione about the new Muggle tents on the market Dudley had seen in a catalogue, and after some badgering, Snape did the enhancing after Hermione had produced the correct spells. Snape had been rather impressed with the Witch. Harry, Hermione, and Snape were planning on starting a franchise for the next World Cup; it didn't hurt to make some money for the future after all.

A few other Wizards had gathered around after hearing Harry's tent spring up and Harry knew his business venture would be a hit and started explaining the tent to the crowd gathering to watch as the other tents went up. The Weasley's abandoned their own tents when Harry produced one more tent. His tents didn't have multiple rooms, but could hold four people apiece comfortably, fully furnished with beds, a small kitchenette and screened off bathroom.

"We'll improve upon them eventually," Hermione stated and entered her tent, Ginny following behind her.

"Wow," was heard from Ginny as she entered. Harry smiled and entered his own tent. Hermione was right; they'd improve upon them eventually. They had only had three weeks of research time after all.

Ron, Hermione, Harry, and Dudley all left to fetch water not too long later. Dudley commented on the various tents and Wizards and

Witches from the other countries as Harry continued to chuckle over the arguments they had all heard when Snape, Remus, and Sirius learned they were all sharing the same tent. Dudley would be sharing with Fred, George, and Percy, while Harry shared with Ron, and Mr. Weasley with his two eldest sons. They'd put Percy in with Dudley with the hope that Fred and George would be more likely to prank their brother before pranking Dudley. Though Dudley was beginning to be the twins new best friend when he had started telling about the pranks he'd pulled the last couple years at Smeltings.

"I really had no idea there were so many Witches and Wizards in the world. Is that guy wearing a dress?" Dudley suddenly said as they approached the water spigot and then he, Hermione, and Harry started laughing at the response to the scolding the man was getting, so hard that they moved out of the line and hid behind a nearby tent until they could control themselves. Ron just stood with kettle in hand and rolled his eyes at the three.

When they finally arrived back at the campsite, after having been stopped by quite a few fellow Hogwarts students, it was to find, Sirius, Remus, Fred, George, and Ginny all sprawled on the ground laughing as Snape and Mr. Weasley were tackling trying to start a fire, and failing miserably. Mr. Weasley was having the time of his life while Snape looked to be itching for his wand. Whether it was to curse Mr. Weasley or start the fire, Harry wasn't so sure.

--

It was sometime after lunch and Harry was sitting with a book in his lap when a shadow fell across him. He looked up to see Professor Snape standing over him. "Could I have a word, Harry?" he asked. Harry nodded and put his book aside before he got up and followed Snape out of the campsite, wondering what this was about. They walked quite a ways into the woods before Snape stopped and turned to Harry. "What happed last time, Death Eaters attacked, yes?"

Harry nodded. "Sometime after the match Death Eaters attack the campsites. But I'm not too sure they will this time. Last time it was just to get people riled up, the Death Eaters didn't know the Dark Lord was back. This time he may want to stay out of the public eye, and

attacking such a big event would certainly not help with that,” Harry reasoned.

“Or he could use this time as the perfect opportunity to get at you,” Snape said seriously.

“Yes, that’s true, but I don’t think he will. There are too many Wizards here, and not enough that support him. If even a quarter of the people here decided to stand against him, his Death Eaters wouldn’t stand a chance,” Harry said rationally. Of course that is if they decided to stand against him, but Harry wasn’t going to voice that opinion. “Besides, I’m determined to have a good time and no Dark Lord is going to stand in my way!” Harry declared with a smile and a chuckle.

Snape pulled something out of his pocket and handed it to Harry. Harry took it and held it up. It was a necklace with a galleon-sized pendent attached to it. It was rather ordinary, just a small silver disk with no engravings, it wasn’t even polished.

“What’s this?” Harry asked curiously.

“My emergency Portkey,” Snape said seriously. “I want you to keep it on you at all times. It is preset to take you to the Hogwarts infirmary. And will only work for one person, so no one can hitch a ride by accident, or on purpose.”

Harry shook his head. “I honestly don’t think I’ll need this Professor, if anyone does, it is you,” Harry said trying to hand it back.

Snape shook his head and pushed the pendent back into Harry’s hand. “No, you will keep this on you at all times,” he commanded.

Harry sighed and put it around his neck. “Alright, I’ll take it, but really the Dark Lord would be a fool to attack tonight.”

Snape sighed. “I only want you to be prepared for anything, Harry.”

“Don’t worry, I’m always prepared; Constant Vigilance and all that rot!”

"You're starting to sound like Moody," Snape said dryly and then laughed as Harry's cringe.

"Just as long as I get to keep all of my body parts intact," Harry laughed.

"Indeed. Come on, we better get back before we're missed, especially by that mutt of a godfather of yours," Snape said and started to lead the way back to the campsite.

"You know, you really could try to get along with him," Harry said lightly.

"We will never get along, Harry, as you well know."

Harry sighed. "I know."

"We would be one step closer to being civil with one another if he would stop being so damn over protective of you," Snape commented with just a touch of anger in his voice.

"He just wants what's best for me," Harry argued quietly.

"What's best for you is for him to stop and think about his words once in awhile! He may want what's best for you, but every time he opens his mouth he hurts you!" Snape growled angrily and then he stopped and put his hands on Harry's shoulders and looked him in the eyes. "You've become a son to me, Harry. I don't like seeing you in pain, especially when that pain is leading you to the knife," he said seriously.

Harry looked at Snape for a moment and then looked at his feet. "How did you know?" he asked with a sigh.

"I didn't, you were scratching your arms again. So it did start again back in February? I told you to come to me, why didn't you?" Snape asked gently.

Harry shook his head and looked up. "I did cut myself after that, but I stopped myself, it was only once, honest. I only just started up again.



I've been having nightmares and the Dreamless Sleep Potion doesn't work for these kinds of nightmares," Harry said quietly and then he closed his eyes and took in a deep breath. After a moment, he opened them again, this time instead of the emotionless mask he'd been wearing the last few weeks, his emotions were laid plainly on his face. "There's something I've been keeping from you. I meant to tell you a long time ago, but it just never was the right time."

"What is it, Harry?" Snape asked worriedly.

"One of the Dark Lord's Horcruxes is me," Harry said shakily.

Snape looked at Harry with horror in his eyes as he abruptly let go of his shoulders. "Why didn't you tell me, Harry?"

Harry looked down and shook his head. "I don't know. I didn't want to worry you."

Harry looked up. "I'm not having nightmares, I've been having visions. I've been seeing through the Dark Lord's eyes for the last year. To be honest Professor, I'm scared as hell! All summer I've been looking over my shoulder. I see the Dark Lord everywhere. I'm afraid every second of the day that the next will be my last. I can't go on like this!"

Snape stared at Harry for a moment, taking in the terror in his dulled emerald eyes, and his shaking limbs and then he suddenly pulled the boy into his arms. "It's alright, Harry. Everything will be alright, I promise," Snape said soothingly as Harry clung to him, burying his face in the man's robes.

"I don't want to die again, I've just gotten used to living," Harry whispered as he began to sob, and Snape just held him all the more tighter, more worried for the boy-who-lived than he'd ever been before.

--

When they arrived back to the campsite a while later, it was to a seething Sirius and a worried bunch of Weasley's, at least of those

who were there. "There you are, Harry, where have you been!" Sirius nearly shouted.

"We went for a walk," Harry said calmly, as an amused smile brushed his face as he looked at Snape and then took in the other three who were still in the campsite, Charlie, Percy, and George Weasley, none of them looked the slightest bit amused. "What's wrong?" Harry asked suddenly concerned.

"What's wrong? You didn't tell anyone where you were going, that's what's wrong!" Sirius said angrily as he glared at Snape. "Anything could have happened to you, you've scared the shit out of us! Arthur, Bill, Remus, and the kids are all still looking for you!"

"I'm sorry, Sirius," Harry said taken aback by Sirius' anger. "I was with Severus. I honestly didn't realize you were all going to worry that much. Next time I'll tell you where I'm going," Harry said calmly, trying to smooth over Sirius' nerves so he'd calm down. It didn't seem to be working though, and Harry could tell that his attempt at calling Snape by his name as his Professor had insisted on their walk back, wasn't going over too well with his godfather either.

"You're sorry? You're always sorry! Can't you for once just think about the rest of us?" Sirius said harshly.

"Black, that is uncalled for!" Snape snapped. "He was perfectly safe, you should be happy that he is alright. He has already apologized for worrying you, why do you always have to drag it on?"

Sirius was certainly not settled by that at all. "Safe! He will never be safe with you, a Death Eater!" Not two seconds later, Sirius was on the ground, massaging the side of his face where a nasty bruise was forming along with a split lip.

Harry stood over his godfather, rage burning in his eyes, his fist still clenched, though it was now at his side. "Don't you ever call him a Death Eater again!" Harry seethed.

Sirius looked up to him from the ground, shock in his eyes. "Harry, I'm sorry."

"No! Don't apologize to me!" Harry shouted. "Apologize to him. He's done more for me than anyone else has ever cared to!" Harry shook his head and then stormed into his tent, leaving the others all staring after him.

Harry sat down on his cot and put his head in his hands. Everything was going to hell, just when things were looking up. He couldn't believe he had just hit Sirius; the man was probably never going to speak to him again. They were supposed to be family but all he saw when he looked at the man was a stranger.

"Harry, can we come in?" Hermione's voice came hesitantly from the entrance of the tent.

"Yes, you can come in," Harry said quietly. Hermione, Ron, Ginny, Dudley, and Fred and George came into the tent and sat down on the other cots.

"Are you alright, Harry, we saw what happened," Hermione asked as she sat down next to him and took his hand.

Harry nodded. "I'm alright; I can't believe I hit Sirius though. I just couldn't take him calling Severus a Death Eater, not after everything he's..."

"Everything he's what, Harry?" probed Hermione gently when Harry didn't finish.

"Severus Snape is the closest thing I have to a father. He's always there for me, even when I'm a complete idiot. I don't know what I'd do without him..." Harry wanted to voice that he certainly wouldn't be alive without him, but he didn't want to put those thoughts into his friends' minds, they didn't need that burden.

A/N: Ok, I'd like to point out, only because several people seem like their confused by a couple of things that will eventually be resolved. There are seven Horcruxes. 1. Voldemort 2. Tom's Diary 3. Slytherin's Ring 4. Helga's Chalice 5. Rowena's Bracelet 6. Nagini 7. Harry. Originally Salazar's Scimitar isn't a Horcrux, was possibly

made one in the future after several had been destroyed. Godric's Sword isn't a Horcrux, but as a founder's object, Harry used it to access the Protectors' magic in Hogwarts in the future. Technically you could call both Godric's and Salazar's swords, Harry's Horcruxes. I hope that answers some Questions. On to the next chapter!

## Chapter Twenty-One – The Quidditch World Cup

Harry looked around guiltily as the lot of them reached the top box. Both Sirius and Snape hadn't been seen since Harry had hit Sirius in defense of Snape. Hermione squeezed his hand tightly. "I'm sure they'll be here, they wouldn't want to miss the game."

Harry nodded and looked around the top box. His eyes settled on the diminutive form of Winky the House Elf. Harry blinked, he'd forgotten. He eyed the empty seat next to her with anger in his eyes, but was forced to look away when Hermione pulled him down into his seat; thankfully far away from the Elf.

"Hermione you see that elf there?" Harry asked. He was fully prepared to expose Crouch Jr. where he sat.

"Yeah, absolutely horrid, poor thing looks like she's scared to death to be up here," Hermione said with anger in her voice. "What about her?" she asked when Harry just stared blankly at the elf.

Harry opened his mouth. "I – I don't know, I just thought..." Harry laughed to himself. "Never mind, I don't know," Harry said as he looked around the box. Whatever it was he was going to comment on had vanished from his mind. The box had been expanded to allow for the extra people; however, Harry had a feeling that two of them wouldn't be attending the match.

"Here look, Harry," Hermione said pointing to her velvet covered, tasseled program. "A display from the team mascots will proceed the match," she read aloud.

Harry nodded and then proceeded to dig around in his bag. Hermione looked at him weird but then looked to Ron in disgust as he showed her how he could make the bloke on the other side of the stadium pick his nose over and over again with his Omnioculars.

"That's disgusting, Ronald," she said and looked back to her program.

"No its not, it's funny, let's see what else we can make people do," Dudley laughed and went back to playing with his Wizard binoculars

beside Ron. Harry was glad that the two of them were getting along. Harry was surprised at how much the two were alike now that Dudley was no longer a bully.

Harry smiled over Ron's shoulder at Mr. Weasley. He'd given the man some money to buy everyone Omnioculars, saying that he didn't want Ron to feel jealous. Arthur had reluctantly agreed as Harry wasn't just buying the Weasley's them, but also everyone else. He had told him that it would allow everyone to enjoy the match better, but he'd rather not everyone know that it was him spending the money.

Harry watched in amusement as over the next half an hour, Percy jumped from his seat every time an important ministry Witch or Wizard entered the box. Most ignored poor Percy, but they all had eyes for Harry when they spotted him over Mr. Weasley's shoulder. Harry just politely nodded in acknowledgement from his seat.

"Enjoying yourself?" A voice came from the row in front of him, Ron and Hermione. Harry looked up to see Snape taking his seat.

"Severus, you're back, where've you been?" Harry asked quietly, though a smile of relief was on his face, he had thought the man had left.

"I was having a conversation with Professor Dumbledore."

"Dumbledore's here? But why isn't he sitting up here with us?" Harry asked.

"He didn't want to sit with the minister," Snape chuckled slightly. "He's only a few rows below the top box. I was also speaking with Lucius Malfoy," Snape said with a roll of his eyes. Harry was instantly alert, Snape noticed this. "Calm down, he just wanted to see how Draco was doing in school."

Harry nodded, though he had a feeling that wasn't the only thing that the blond Death Eater wanted with the Potions Master. Harry was brought around from staring at Snape when Minister Fudge and the

Bulgarian Minister came into the top box, Fudge gesturing wildly, trying to make the other minister understand him.

Fudge tried to shake Harry's hand, but Harry just raised an eyebrow and turned to the Bulgarian Minister for Magic and nodded politely before he retook his seat, quick to get out of the spotlight as the Malfoy's also entered into the top box.

Lucius glared at Harry and Harry smirked back, obviously Lucius was still sore about Dobby. Draco quickly took his seat, ignoring his father's introduction of him and his mother to the Minister as he pulled out his own pair of Omnioculars and began fiddling with them. Harry noted that Draco didn't look so good, he was nervous and fidgety, and he kept glancing over at Harry. Harry felt sympathy for his old school rival. He'd probably been brought before the Dark Lord, or if not yet, would be soon.

Harry turned back to the stadium and smiled slightly when he saw Sirius sneak in behind Ludo Bagman. Sirius however, didn't look at Harry as he took his seat next to Remus. He still sported a rather nasty bruise, which was also forming into a bit of a black eye. Harry winced, feeling all the more guilty. Hermione squeezed his hand and looked at him with concern in her eyes. Harry shook his head and looked away. He made it a point not to look back up again until after the Bulgarian's team mascots, the Veela, had stopped dancing and singing. He was slightly amused by most of the men's reactions around him though as he pulled the ear plugs from his ears; especially Ron and Dudley's reactions.

Hermione shook her head and rolled her eyes and then looked at Harry who had pulled Ron back down into his seat, Mr. Weasley doing the same to Dudley. "You knew, how?" she asked.

Harry shrugged. "Bulgaria's always used Veela; it says it in all of the Quidditch books. Hey look, Leprechauns!" Harry laughed as Ron and Dudley tried to catch the gold falling from the giant shamrock, which was made up of a lot of little men in green. "Don't take the gold too seriously; it'll disappear in a few hours. Leprechauns never give anything away."

Hermione nodded. "Harry's right, it says so in Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them."

Ron and Dudley pouted and dropped the gold. "Yes, but it does still last for a few hours," Fred said deviously.

"Think of everything we could buy before then," George added and Dudley and Ron laughed and scooped up the gold again.

Hermione huffed and rolled her eyes and then turned back to the stadium as the Bulgarian and Irish Quidditch teams were introduced. Harry focused back on the pitch himself, playing with his own Omnioculars.

The game was just as exciting as it had been the last time, but this time Harry focused more on the match and less on his Omnioculars, though he did have it set to record the whole match to watch it over and over again later. The game was really brutal and Harry was loving it, cheering and booing along with the rest of the Irish supporters.

When Krum got hit by the Bludger just before the end of the game, Harry immediately turned his attention to Lynch, and stood as he caught the moment the other Seeker spotted the Snitch, he'd spotted it to. "Look at Lynch, he's seen the Snitch!" Harry yelled and everyone in the top box turned their attention away from Krum. But that was short lived as Krum was quickly on Lynch's tail and drawing level with him too.

"They're going to crash!" shrieked Hermione as she also stood.

"They're not!" roared Ron, jumping up and down with excitement.

"Lynch is!" yelled Harry and then winced as the Irish Seeker plowed into the ground.

"Trampled by angry Veela, what a way to go!" laughed Dudley.

"The Snitch, where's the Snitch!" bellowed Charlie down the row.



“Krum’s got it! And Ireland’s won!” yelled Harry pointing to a bloodied Krum who held up the Snitch in his hand.

“IRELAND WINS!” shouted Bagman after a stunned moment as the crowds grew louder. “KRUM GETS THE SNITCH – BUT IRELAND WINS – good lord I don’t think any of us were expecting that!”

Everyone of the Weasley’s, Hermione, Dudley, Snape, Sirius, and Remus all turned to look at Harry. “What?” Harry shrugged and then laughed. “It was a sure statistical probability.” Everyone laughed and rolled their eyes.

Harry saw George and Fred high five each other and he wondered just how much they had bet. He was glad that the match had gone the same this time around as it had last time, especially because of his bet with the Goblins of Gringotts.

“Vell, ve fought bravely,” said a gloomy voice behind Harry; it was the Bulgarian Minister of magic.

“But it was a great game,” commented Harry and the Bulgarian Minister nodded a twitch of a smile coming to his lips.

“You can speak English!” said Fudge in outrage. “And you’ve been letting me mime everything all day!”

“Vell, it vos very funny,” the Bulgarian Minister said with a shrug.

Harry laughed at Fudge. “You mean you didn’t know he could speak English?”

Fudge straightened and turned away from Harry with a frown on his face. Harry continued to laugh; it was fun pissing off the Minister of Magic.

Harry blocked his eyes as the blinding white light magically illuminated the top box, so that everyone could see inside. He watched as the two Quidditch teams were brought into the Box and the Quidditch Cup was handed over to the Irish team and lifted into the air by Troy and Quigley and the crowds went wild yet again. It

was a great game the first time around and even better the second, Harry thought.

Harry and the rest of the kids all chatted as they made their way out of the top box and down the purple-carpeted stairs; the adults had all gone a ways ahead, where they were met up with Dumbledore, but were still in seeing distance. "So, Harry, how much money did you make?" Dudley asked. "You never did tell us what it was you bet those goblins."

Harry shrugged. "I don't know. I bet somewhere around half of what was in my Gringotts vault." Everyone suddenly stopped in their tracks and stared at Harry opened mouthed.

"Y-you bet half of all the gold in your G-Gringotts vault?" Ron stuttered.

"Yeah, just about that," Harry said straight faced and then burst out laughing at the look on Ron's face. "I'm kidding, Ron, I only bet twenty-five galleons. I may seem as if I have lots of money, but that has to last me until I can get a career and Hogwarts isn't cheap." Ron looked to deflate and the others started laughing. What Harry didn't say was those twenty-five galleons was from his family vault, the most he could withdraw from it at the moment, and he had bet over five thousand from his vault, but Ron didn't need to know that. He simply continued to grin at his friend as Ron laughed along with everyone else.

"I made a good hundred galleons myself," Hermione said with a smile on her face. "What about you, Fred and George, how much did you two make?"

The twins looked pensive for a moment and then the two said in unison, "About a thousand galleons; should be enough to start up Weasley's Wizard Wheezes." Wicked grins formed on both the twins' faces and Harry laughed again.

Ron grumbled something about the unfairness of not having any money.

"I made about a thousand pounds myself," Dudley said. "If I save up enough money, I'll be able to buy the car I want by the time I can get my license."

Harry laughed to himself. The last time around, Dudley would have never considered saving up his own money to buy a car, he just would have asked Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon. He'd certainly changed over the last year. His entire family had.

Harry looked around as they started to move into the crowds and that was when he noticed they were a Weasley short. "Hey guys, where's Ginny?" he asked and the others all turned around to look at him, also just noticing for the first time that she was missing. Fred and George, being of the tallest looked ahead to the group of adults.

"She's not with the others," Fred announced.

"Maybe she's still coming down from the top box," Harry said absently, there was something in the back of his mind telling him something was terribly wrong, but he couldn't figure out why. "Fred go ahead and tell everyone else to wait, I'm going back to look."

"Harry, not alone," Hermione said, but Harry was already quickly making his way back up the stairs through the last people coming down.

"Ginny?" Harry called as he made his way all the way back up to the top box; he was slightly out of breath when he finally arrived back up into the box. "Ginny..." Harry stopped in his tracks. The box was empty except for Ginny, who was staring ahead at Harry with fear in her eyes. Harry's eyes narrowed and it was as if his memory suddenly cleared. Why hadn't he turned him in when he had the chance? "Let her go, Crouch," he said loudly.

Crouch Jr. laughed lowly as he slowly pulled off the invisibility cloak to reveal that he had Ginny at wand point, with Ginny's wand. "So it's true what the Dark Lord's told us."

Harry clenched his jaw and flexed his hand to allow his wand to drop from his wrist holster on his left wrist. He slowly raised his wand in his left hand. "I said, Let. Her. Go." Harry hissed with venom in his voice.

"I don't think so, Potter, our Lord wants a word with you, in fact I'm pretty sure he wants you dead," Crouch chuckled evilly, if not a little insanely. Ginny was now trembling in fear and yelped when Crouch grasped her arm tightly. "Follow me onto the pitch, Potter, if you want the little girl to live!" With that said Ginny and Crouch disappeared with a crack.

Harry ran to the edge of the box and looked down onto the pitch. He could see the Dark Lord, just standing there surrounded by Death Eaters, but it didn't seem as if any of the departing crowds had noticed. He watched as Ginny and Crouch appeared beside the Dark Lord and Ginny was thrown to the ground.

Harry paced in his spot for a moment, trying to make a decision. If he went down there, the odds were that he would die. Of course there was always the fluke of a chance that he wouldn't. Through all of his thoughts one came through to the forefront of his mind. He wouldn't let Ginny die, not again!

Harry came quickly to his decision and grabbed into his pack and pulled out a small shrunken object. Harry un-shrunk his Firebolt. Impulsive as ever, he didn't give two more seconds of thought before he jumped onto the broom and flew out of the top box, going at the top speed straight towards the pitch.

"Harry!" he heard someone yell from the moving crowds below and just as he flew over the pitch, he started to hear screams. Obviously Harry had broken whatever charm had been over the pitch and now everyone could see the Dark Lord and his followers. At least he'd have some help in this suicide non-plan of his.

Harry was about ten feet away from landing when a spell hit his broom and he was thrown off and came to a tumbling stop on the lawn of the pitch. His bag and Firebolt both landed about twenty feet away from him in opposite directions. Harry scrambled to his feet and pointed his wand directly at the Dark Lord.

"Let her go, Tom!" he demanded, still trying to get his breath back from the rather harsh landing which had knocked the air out of his lungs.

"My, my, Harry, such bravery to come rescue her, or foolishness," the Dark Lord laughed menacingly. "Drop your wand, and come to me, or she dies, again."

Harry glared at Tom for a moment, ignoring the screams from those still in the stands and then he dropped his wand onto the grassy pitch. He walked forward defeat in his eyes and stopped in front of the Dark Lord. Riddle smirked. "Let her go," Harry said through clenched teeth.

The Dark Lord suddenly backhanded Harry across the face, sending him to the ground in a daze. Ginny screamed his name and Harry fought through the spots dancing in front of his eyes to scramble to at least his knees and looked up at her as she was restrained, but his attention was quickly brought back to the Dark Lord, who grabbed Harry's chin roughly and forced Harry to look up at him. Harry could taste blood coming from what he assumed was a split lip, but he couldn't be certain as his face was still rather numb from the impact of the Dark Lord's fist.

"You boy will address me as My Lord," Riddle hissed while looking into Harry's eyes.

"No, let her go!" Harry said defiantly and then flinched when the Dark Lord raised his hand to strike him again.

Riddle laughed darkly in response. "I'm ordering you to address me as My Lord," he sneered, still looking into Harry's eyes.

Harry felt a tingling sensation in the back of his mind and he started to feel the hazy effect of the Imperious Curse. Harry slammed up his Occlumency shields and retched his face out of Riddle's grasp as he clenched his teeth hard together from the sudden pain.

"Let her go," Harry spit out again and he was backhanded to the ground again.

"I will let her go, when you address me as My Lord," the Dark Lord said with a smirk as Harry pushed himself back up, wiping blood away from his mouth with his shirt sleeve.

Harry couldn't believe he was going to do this, but he didn't want to see Ginny die. "Please, My Lord, let her go," Harry forced out.

Tom laughed. "See now that wasn't so hard, now was it? Let the girl go," he said quietly and Crouch hesitated before releasing Ginny.

Ginny looked to Harry, still on his knees in front of the Dark Lord, but Harry didn't look at her. "Run," he said clearly. Ginny hesitated but then ran. She was halfway to the edge of the pitch when she screamed and Harry looked over to her. Crouch had appeared in front of her and pulled her against him. Harry looked back to the Dark Lord, with anger in his eyes, but Riddle wasn't looking at him, but at Crouch, a smirk plastered on his lips.

Harry sprung to his feet and sprinted toward Ginny. He screamed in his head and lifted his right hand. The effects were immediate as Ginny was yanked away from Crouch and straight into Harry's arms. Harry instantly spun them away, shielding Ginny's smaller frame with his own. He cried out as several curses tore into the muscles in his back. He fell over Ginny and then push the girl away from him, as he summoned his wand. "Go, get out of here!" he gasped out

"Harry!" she shrieked trying to protest, but he pulled off and tossed Snape's Portkey at the girl.

"Activate!" he bit out loudly as it hit her and she disappeared. Harry stood and spun around, breathing heavily, and glared at the Dark Lord. He could feel blood soaking through the back of his shirt and knew there were probably quite a few cuts, welts, and bruises there now. "This is between you and me!" Harry hissed dangerously through clenched teeth, ignoring the pain from his back as he again pointed his wand towards the bane of his existence.

The Dark Lord smirked and then walked forward, his wand in hand. He held up his hand to his Death Eaters, who all had their wands

pointed at Harry. "Very well," he said calmly as he bowed mockingly and immediately started off with the Avada Kedavra Curse.

Harry dodge backwards as the curse sizzled the ground at his feet. Riddle was playing his favorite game, toy with Harry Potter. Harry glared and then he noticed that Riddle wasn't using his wand, or rather the brother wand to his own, but a different one. So he'd learned from his previous mistake, Harry smirked.

"Missing your wand a bit, Tommy?" Harry taunted as he glanced at the crowds, just standing there watching. Why were they just standing there?

"You, boy, will address me as My Lord!" the Dark Lord spat. "Avada Kedavra!"

Harry dodged again. "No, I think I'll address you by your given name, thank you very much. Confringo!" Harry spat, he knew it wouldn't work and he was right as his curse was blocked.

The Death Eaters laughed as their master moved further towards Harry. Harry decided to chance it and spat out as many curses as he could think of, it put the Dark Lord on the defensive like he wanted but his spells were all simply blocked. In fact many were sent back at Harry and he had to dodge his own spell fire.

Harry stumbled and rolled back, sending off another barrage of curses that again got blocked. This was hopeless! All his training and he still couldn't best the Dark Lord in a duel! Tom suddenly whipped his wand around in a spiral and Harry quickly dodged again as a whip of fire struck at him, there was nothing he knew that could block that but perhaps his sword, and he was too far away from his bag, where it was shrunken. He wasn't so lucky the second time the whip came around and he screamed as his back was torn into again.

Harry managed to stay on his feet, barely, and then used his right arm to block the whip again. He screamed as the whip wrapped around his wand arm and yanked him to his knees before the fire disappeared. Harry scrambled shakily back to his feet, switching his

wand to his left hand, only to be struck back again as an arrow pierced his left shoulder. Harry landed on his back with an anguished yell ripped from his lungs as his wand fell from his now useless left hand. He grasped at the arrow with his already burnt right hand only to have the arrow disintegrate into acid and burn him further.

Tom laughed as Harry yelled out again and then, bloody and battered, forced himself back to his feet, his wand grasped in his burnt hand and his left arm hanging as if boneless at his side. If he was going to die again, he'd go down fighting! But a simple summoning charm had his wand yanked away and Harry swayed once before falling to his hand and knees, panting from the pain wracking his body.

"Crucio."

Harry screamed again as the curse washed over him. And as he curled into a ball on the ground, a single thought went through his mind. Why wasn't anyone helping him? There were thousands of Wizards there, watching while their savior was slowly being tortured to death, why wasn't anyone saving him?

"Because, Potter, they are not foolish enough to stand against me. They are very much aware of what happens when they stand against Lord Voldemort," the Dark Lord answered his unasked question and then the curse was lifted and Harry slumped onto the grassy pitch, visibly shaking and panting heavily as pain from the curse scar continued to course over his body even after the Cruciatus was lifted. Harry looked up to the Dark Lord, he hadn't even felt Tom enter his mind.

Riddle was still toying with him, or he'd be dead right now, Harry knew. He was no fool; he hardly had the strength to stand at the moment. "They'll stand against you one day," Harry rasped. "Whether it's for some else or me."

"They don't care about you. All they want is for you to be a weapon, a tool against someone you have never had the hope of defeating," Tom hissed as he circled Harry. "Had you joined me..." the Dark Lord chuckled as he shook his head. "But you could never do that. You could never, what was it you said, oh yes, 'sink to my level.' Oh but,



Harry, you have. You've gone far into the depths of darkness to defeat me, haven't you? Cursing poor Peter with the Cruciatus Curse... No, that didn't last long enough. Blood magic, to rid yourself of that scar, yes, that was dark magic, but not nearly dark enough." The Dark Lord was now kneeling down next to Harry. "What about invoking your rights as Protector. Are you willing to do that again, if it would mean defeating me? The Darkness of Hogwarts, Protector, we all succumb to it, will you?" he whispered. "Crucio."

Harry screamed again as the curse washed over him. He clawed at the ground attempting to get away from the pain and Riddle. The curse was again lifted and he gripped at the grass, breathing heavily and looking away from the crowds watching. His head was suddenly yanked up by the Dark Lord's pale hand. "No don't look away, Harry. Look at all of those who could care less about their savior. Even your dear Potion's master, the man you think of as a father, will not come to help you." Harry shakily shook his head in denial, tears blurring his vision. "Oh, yes," he whispered, still harshly holding Harry's chin in his hand. "I wonder what it would take to finally break you?" he said more to himself and Harry looked up into the Dark Lord's red eyes and saw his death, drawn out and painful, staring down at him, he looked away.

"Just kill me," Harry spat through aftershocks, blood coming to his lips from his obviously damaged lungs.

Tom laughed darkly as he harshly released Harry's chin. "A once noble Gryffindor waiting for death?" He raised his wand and pointed it between Harry's eyes. "Pathetic," the Dark Lord hissed and that one word sent a rage through Harry that turned his eyes into the fires hell. "Avada Kedavra."

Harry didn't know how but something snapped in him and he found the strength to roll out of the way of the curse that scorched the ground, and back to his feet. "Missed me," he spat; his voice cold as ice and then he spit out the blood welling in his mouth. "Accio wand!" he growled and his wand soared into his hand. "I'm not Dark enough, am I Riddle?" Harry hissed quietly as his eyes turned completely red with a touch of gold at their center. The Dark Lord's eyes widened and he took a step back and raised his own wand, but Harry was

quicker. "Dilabi Caro," he yelled and a molten stream of white fire burst forth from his wand. A boom, as if thunder accompanied the magic that shot towards the Dark Lord in a beam of silver colored light and Harry could feel his hand being burned more as his wand was consumed by the flames pouring forth with the magic.

Tom's eyes widened again and he dove to the side just as the magic disappeared. He stood there for a second with a gleam forming in his eyes, thinking that Harry had missed, but it was only a second before he let out a horribly anguished scream as his entire right arm disintegrated into nothing but dust. He sent one last glare of hatred at Harry before he disappeared with a thunderous crack, taking his Death Eaters with him.

Harry's eyes faded back into their natural green color as he stared at the empty pitch in front of him. "Damn," Harry whispered as his arm dropped first and then his knees buckled and he collapsed onto the pitch.

"Harry!" Snape yelled as he and many others ran towards him. Snape dropped to his side. "Oh Merlin," he whispered as he looked him over, taking in all of his injuries. "Harry, stay with me, we're getting you help."

Harry opened his eyes and looked up to the man he considered a father. "S-Severus," he whispered. "Why didn't anyone help me?" he asked before he passed out.

A/N: Want some answers too, keep on reading.

## Chapter Twenty-Two – Memories and Truths

“Imperio, Kill Ginevra Weasley.”

“No, I won’t,” his reply came out feeble this time. But he fought against the curse with everything he knew.

“Imperio, Kill Ginevra Weasley.”

The curse struck Harry for the fourth time, again by a different Wizard. Harry felt his hand raise shakily.

“No, Harry, fight it, please!” Ginny yelled, tears streaming down her face. “Just a little longer, they’ll be here!”

Harry focused on his hand, focused through the curses that befuddled his mind. “I won’t!” he yelled, snapping the curse for the sixth time.

“Imperio. Kill Her Now!”

Harry tried to fight the last curse, the Dark Lord’s curse, but everything happened so fast. The sharp spike in his mind, the command, and then the spell left him. “Caedere,” as soon as the word left his lips the curse was released and he fell to his knees at the same time as Ginny dropped lifeless, a slash across her throat where blood was spilling out. He’d killed Ginny...

“No! Ginny, no, I’m so sorry! No!” Harry cried over and over as he thrashed around.

Snape bound him to the hospital bed for the sixth time in the last three hours. He rather much preferred it when he was simply unconscious, as lifeless as he looked. “Is there nothing we can do to wake him up!” he snapped at Madame Pomfrey for the fourth time as he bound Harry’s bandaged arms to the bed again. He kept breaking the magical bonds, which was supposed to be impossible.

Madame Pomfrey shook her head. "As I told you, Severus, I don't want to risk it; I don't know what would happen. I've never seen a curse like this before."

Dumbledore suddenly entered into the Hospital Wing, closing the door firmly behind him. "Has there been any change?" he asked gently.

Snape shook his head. "Have you found anything about what he was hit with?" he asked tiredly. He hadn't left Harry's side for a moment, not since the dreams started, but Snape had a feeling they weren't normal dreams, but memories. Dumbledore shook his head in reply, concern in his aged eyes. Snape looked back to the boy, who was still mumbling incoherently, the same thing, but at least wasn't thrashing still.

Harry suddenly went limp and Snape snapped back to his side. "Harry, can you hear me? Please, Harry, it's Severus," he said gently as he ran his hand over Harry's sweat drenched hair, hoping for the boy to finally awaken.

"Why didn't anyone help me?" Harry whimpered. This was the eighth time the boy had said this. Snape closed his eyes as Harry elapsed into another memory.

Harry only flinched slightly as he sliced into his right wrist with Slytherin's sword and then his left with Gryffindor's. He watched for a moment with mild fascination while the blood freely flowed from his wounds. "Please Hogwarts. I invoke my right of Protector. Grant me thy power to defeat mine enemy, in return I give you my soul and my enemy's." Harry gasped as magic started to flow around him and then the blade of Slytherin's sword started to glow, not a second later Gryffindor's too started to pulse with magic. The two blades lifted up and crossed in front of him and Harry stared in fear as a black current of magic came from the stone under his feet and pierced into him and enveloped him completely.

Harry hissed as golden chains wrapped around his bleeding wrists, holding him to the place he stood as the magic continued to build and then a white beam shot out of his chest and into the crossed swords.

Harry screamed as a piece of him was ripped out of him, and then he fell to his knees, gasping as the dark magic took its place; a place where part of his soul had been.

A silver beam of light came from the high ceiling and struck Harry in the head and then it retracted, taking a black, tinged green mass with it. Harry watched in fascination as the silver beam encircled the mass and then disintegrated it.

The chains vanished and Harry closed his eyes as he sunk into the magic still pulsing around him. "Thank you, Hogwarts," he whispered hoarsely and then screamed again as the magic around him suddenly converged on him and absorbed into his own.

Snape watched and waited as Harry stopped thrashing again and then he took the momentary pause to quickly stanch the bleeding at the boy's wrists. He looked back to Poppy. She was staring ashen faced.

She shook her head at his pleading gaze and looked to Dumbledore. Dumbledore was staring at Harry's still form. He shook his head. "If we wake him it could cause more harm than good."

A banging was heard at the Hospital Wing doors again. They'd locked everyone out when Harry had started having the fits. At first they were off and on, but now they were getting more frequent. All anyone could assume was that he had been hit with some sort of curse before Voldemort had vanished and they'd finally been able to get onto the Quidditch Pitch.

"Headmaster, if we don't wake him, he could... please," Snape pleaded, not wanting to think about what would happen if Harry came to the memory of his death. They'd refrained from waking him with magic, not knowing what the side effects would be.

"We'll wait a little longer, hopefully he'll wake up on his own," Dumbledore said quietly, though there was uncertainty in his voice as Harry started to mumble incoherently and his head rolled back and forth on his pillow.

Harry hung limply from the chains that bound him to the wall. He had no strength anymore and all he wanted to do was die. Why hadn't anyone come to rescue him yet? Why hadn't anyone helped him, Ron and Hermione? They were dead, and it was his fault...

The Dark Lord entered into the cell and lifted Harry's head up so that dull emerald eyes met red. "Losing hope, Potter? A once noble Gryffindor, waiting for death; pathetic," Tom hissed as he let Harry's head drop and pointed his wand at the boy.

"I'm not pathetic, I'm not... No, stop PLEASE!" Harry screamed and thrashed on the bed again.

Snape, Dumbledore, and Madame Pomfrey watched horrified as a long jagged gash suddenly appeared down the left side of Harry's face, resembling much too closely the scar that adorned the boy's forehead.

Snape grabbed Harry's arms as he once again broke the bonds. "We have to wake him up! Can't you see this is killing him!" yelled Snape at the stunned Medi-Witch.

Madame Pomfrey looked to Dumbledore, anxiousness written all over her face. Dumbledore finally nodded.

"Alright, Severus, move out of the way," Madame Pomfrey said and pointed her wand hesitantly at the still thrashing boy, and said loudly and clearly, "Enervate Maximus." The spell shot out of her wand and hit Harry making him glow momentarily.

Harry gasped and then instantly stilled and Snape was back at his side not a second later. "Harry?"

Harry's eyes slowly fluttered open. "Professor," he whispered and Snape sighed a breath of relief. "Is Ginny alright?" he asked hoarsely after a moment as he started to wake up fully, but his eyes were so dull, almost lifeless. Snape didn't like the look in his eyes at all.

"Yes, she's fine, you saved her, do you remember?" he asked gently.

“Yes. The Dark Lord was torturing me... and everyone was standing there, staring... Why didn’t anyone help me?” Harry said the last almost coldly, his eyes filled with tears and he looked away.

“We tried, Harry...” Snape gently moved Harry’s face so he was looking in his eyes. “We tried, but there was some sort of shield, we couldn’t get through it. Hundreds of us tried to get through!” Snape said gently but with a tone that made Harry really look at him. The tone was one of helplessness and Harry believed him, had it been anyone else to tell him he probably wouldn’t have though.

Harry slowly nodded. “Why am I tied up?” he asked after a moment.

“You were thrashing,” Madame Pomfrey said and then she banished what was left of the magical bindings and gently moved his face to look at the new wound that the boy didn’t even seem to notice was there. “How do you feel?” she asked.

“I’m fine,” Harry said and for the first time didn’t correct himself or elaborate when the glances turned on him. Harry rolled over so he was facing away from Snape and Madame Pomfrey. The two looked at each other and then to Dumbledore, all three had concern in their eyes, but Snape was more worried when Harry simply repeated, “I’m fine.”

--

A couple days after Harry had awoken in the Hospital Wing, he was released. It was a good thing too, as classes had started several days before that and he’d already missed most of that day. Harry was more than anxious to get back to classes and a sense of normalcy the moment he was released that afternoon. Instead of heading to class with Hermione and Ron, however, Harry was sitting in the Headmasters office, waiting nervously for Dumbledore who had said he would be up as soon as lunch was through.

Harry fidgeted in his seat, scratching lightly at the slowly healing scar on his face with his left hand as his right was still thoroughly bandaged from the burns he had sustained. No one had yet to explain to him how he had gotten that scar, but Harry had a perfect

memory of when he was given it, it just hadn't happened yet. But as to the why he was so nervous? No one had yet to question him and he didn't really want to be questioned, not yet, so soon after... The flood of memories he'd had when he was unconscious were still fresh in his memory, he just didn't want to talk about the whole ordeal and especially not about the Dark Lord.

He knew Dumbledore would ask eventually, after all it wasn't everyday that an underage Wizard could perform the Dilabi Caro Curse. In fact many adult Wizards couldn't perform the curse correctly as one needed to sustain a huge amount of power throughout the use of the curse. Frankly, Harry was surprised he'd been able to do it, not just because he was half-dead, but because it was simply that powerful.

He had first read about the curse in *Verdammt und die Dunkelheit*. It was one of the first curses he had translated the information about. The curse literally ate away the flesh and bone of the victim, turning it to dust, and though no one in history had held the curse that long, it was rumored that it could also destroy the soul of the victim. If the caster had enough control, they could draw out the victim's death, making it both excruciatingly painful and slow, just as they could make it very swift. But usually their wand was destroyed before then. Harry's wand was miraculously unscathed by the fire that had engulfed it and his hand and Harry had a feeling it had to do with the core being that of a Phoenix feather.

The curse sickened him. He never would have thought of using the spell before, it was a very dark spell, almost as bad as the Killing Curse itself. There was no blocking it and it was the only thing that came to his mind in his rage. Harry didn't know why he'd used it, maybe to prove to the Dark Lord that he could be dark... or maybe to prove it to himself. He could only imagine what Riddle would say, probably congratulate him...

Harry's head suddenly snapped up and around as the door to Dumbledore's office opened and not only Dumbledore, but also Sirius came into the office. Harry drew his gaze away from the second Wizard; he was still feeling guilty about hitting Sirius, but he had yet to apologize.



Dumbledore took his seat behind his desk and Sirius sat down beside his godson. The headmaster waved his wand and produced a tea set. "Would you care for some tea, Harry?" he asked amiably.

Harry nodded, if only to be polite and took the teacup handed to him, but he just held the cup lightly in his left hand, not interested in the tea at all, it just gave him something to focus on. "What did you want to speak with me about?" Harry asked hesitantly.

"To be truthful, Harry, that final curse you used against the Dark Lord," Dumbledore answered seriously.

Harry looked down at his hands and the swirling tea. "I don't know why I used it," Harry said truthfully as he looked back up to Dumbledore. "I don't even know why I remembered it. It was the first thing that came to my mind while he was... when he was..." Harry took in a deep breath, his hands started to shake and he put the teacup on the desk before he dropped it. "I really don't want to talk about this right now. I'm sorry," Harry breathed and looked away fighting back his emotions replacing the turmoil in his eyes with a dull almost lifeless mask that hid his emotions from the world.

Sirius put a hand on Harry's shoulder and squeezed lightly. "None of us can imagine what it must have been like for you, but I know what it was like for me, only being able to watch, and not stop it..." Sirius trailed off and Harry looked up to his godfather who had tears in his eyes and Harry felt ten times more guilt settle over his shoulders.

"I'm sorry, Sirius, for hitting you," Harry said quietly. He felt that he had to unburden some of his guilt. He just had so much. He looked up to Dumbledore again. "I really don't know why or how I used that curse, please, Professor, believe me I'm really –"

Dumbledore held up his hand to silence Harry. "Harry, you are not in trouble, you have nothing to apologize for. You were in an extremely... horrid situation, no one is blaming you for anything. We only feel that you should talk about this with someone. Severus told me that you have not yet even spoken to him," Dumbledore said gently. "This is not something you should bottle up inside."

Harry nodded, he fully agreed that he should talk about this, but he couldn't right now. "I will, I just can't right now. I don't want to think about what he... please, don't make me talk about it right now."

Dumbledore nodded. "Alright, you don't have to talk about it right now, but please, promise me you will talk to someone soon. I don't want to see you fall back into old patterns because of this," he said quietly, showing genuine concern in his aged blue eyes.

Sirius looked at Dumbledore and then Harry curiously. Harry was thankful to see that Dumbledore hadn't told his godfather about what he knew of Harry's once suicidal thoughts. "I will Professor, I promise. I don't want to fall into old patterns either."

Dumbledore smiled a small smile. "You may go to your class now if you want. I'm sure Professor Snape is wondering where his apprentice is." Harry nodded and stood. "Professor Black can walk you down, I'll let him be your excuse."

Harry smiled thinly at Dumbledore before leaving with Sirius. Harry knew what Dumbledore was trying to do, he wanted him to talk to Sirius, tell him what Dumbledore was not telling him. Harry didn't want to do that to his godfather, he was sure it would make the man feel horribly guilty, but it was better he told him rather than Dumbledore.

"What are old tendencies, Harry, and do they have something to do with the scars on your arms?" Sirius finally asked about half way to the Dungeons. They were on a staircase and Harry stopped and sat down onto them with a heavy sigh.

"Yes," Harry answered as Sirius sat down next to him. "And they aren't old tendencies, Dumbledore just doesn't know." Harry pulled back his sleeves and using his left hand, waved his wand over his arms to show some old and new scars that appeared there. "I was suicidal when I was younger, I'm not now," Harry said honestly as Sirius took one arm and then the other, looking in shock at all the cuts, completely ignoring the Dark Mark, as if it weren't there. "I use the cutting as an outlet, at least that's what Professor Snape calls it,"

Harry said lightly as he took back his arms and recovered them. "He's tried to get me to stop, and I do, but then something happens, nightmares mostly and I just can't stop myself and I can't go to him, even though I promised, because I'm too ashamed I've started up again."

Sirius was silent for a very long time before he finally asked in a very quiet voice, as if he didn't want to know the answer. "I'm one of your triggers, aren't I?"

Harry looked up to Sirius and then looked away. Had he really been that observant? "No, of course not," Harry answered looking out through the banister and down into the entrance hall.

"Harry look at me and tell me that I'm not one of your triggers," Sirius said adamantly.

Harry looked up and then looked down again. "I can't," he whispered and then looked up again, tears in his eyes. "I'm sorry. I don't know why, I don't want you to be."

Sirius wrapped his arm around Harry's shoulders and pulled him against him. "It's alright," he said firmly, hugging him tightly. "It's alright, we'll figure out why I'm triggering this and fix it."

Harry didn't respond to that, he didn't want to tell his godfather that he didn't think that they could fix it. Harry couldn't tell him why he was one of his triggers, not without revealing that he was from the future and Harry really couldn't do that. Harry felt even more guilty then he had before going to Dumbledore's office.

--

A while later, about half an hour through his class period, Harry finally slid into his seat beside Hermione. He looked back at Sirius who was talking with Snape quietly. He couldn't hear what they were saying but he frowned slightly when Sirius held out his hand and Snape shook it.

Hermione tugged on his robe sleeve. "Are you seeing what I'm seeing?"

Harry only nodded and then turned back to see what the rest of the class was doing as Sirius left. Snape squeezed his shoulder briefly as he walked by him to the front of the class. Harry proceeded to gather his potions supplies. He had been about to start his potion when Snape came and stood in front of him.

"You don't have to make the potion, Harry, you don't have enough time, but you've done this potion before. If you'd like to help the others though, you're welcome to," Snape said quietly. Harry nodded, not looking up to Snape who he could tell was studying him closely and continued to throughout the class.

Harry was helping Neville and Ron when Snape announced for them to pack up. Harry looked at his watch, he hadn't even realized the time had gone by so quickly he was so focused in helping those around him.

"Harry, could you please stay behind?" Snape asked as everyone else packed up their belongings. Harry nodded reluctantly.

"Don't worry, Mate, we'll save you some food, if Fred and George don't eat it all first," Ron chuckled.

"Don't you mean if you don't eat it all first," Hermione said as she rolled her eyes and smirked at Harry.

"Hey, I'm a growing boy, Hermione, I need a lot of food... On second thought, Harry, every man for himself," Ron managed to say before Hermione shoved him out of the classroom.

Hermione rolled her eyes again and smiled at Harry before following. "Honestly, Ronald..."

Harry missed the end of Hermione's scolding of his best mate as they got out of hearing range, but he was pretty sure he'd heard that one before. Harry took a deep breath before turning to face Snape. "You wanted to talk to me, sir?"

Snape waited until the last student had left before he closed the door and finally turned back to Harry. He didn't say anything, just stared at Harry intently. Harry stared back for quite a while until he finally looked away and paced the front of the classroom. Snape was trying to get him to talk, that was obvious.

"I don't want to talk about it," Harry finally said as he stopped in his tracks and looked up to Snape. "I'm not talking about it," he said strongly when the man continued only to stare at him.

"Will you ever talk about it?" Snape asked quietly.

"When I'm ready," Harry answered, a slight coldness to his voice as he turned away from Snape.

"After or before you've slit your wrists, Harry?" Snape said challengingly.

Harry spun back and opened his mouth to retort, but nothing came out. The fact was he was itching for a knife at that very moment. Harry dropped into a seat and put his head in hands. "I almost died. I told him to kill me. He was in my head, I didn't even feel him there, all I wanted was for it to all end, and then he said... I don't know what happened. Something welled up inside of me and all I wanted was for him to suffer as much as I'd suffered! It was the only thing I could think of... I wanted him to feel pain worse than the Cruciatus, I had wanted him to see his death in my eyes just like I saw mine in his..." Harry said through clenched teeth, tears in his eyes as he looked out over the classroom unseeingly.

Snape put his hands on Harry's shaking shoulders. "Look at me, Harry." Harry looked up. "After everything you have gone through, it is not wrong to want revenge."

Harry shook his head. "It's not simple revenge, Severus," Harry said quietly. "If it were only that..." Harry jumped up from his seat and started to pace again. He stopped after a while and looked to Snape. "Part of being a Protector, and why the others turned against the school is because there is a well of Dark Magic, I guess you could

call it a current of some sort, which can be tapped into. The only problem is once you've had a taste you never want to give it up. That's why the Dark Lord is so attached to Hogwarts, he wants that magic back. I've had a taste of that magic, Severus, and the only thing that went through my mind while I was being tortured, was using that magic against him; even knowing I'd lose myself." Harry stopped, the entire time he'd looked Snape in the eyes, now he looked away. "I think that magic took control of me just as he was about to kill me and I think I let it," Harry whispered, terror in his voice.

A/N: Question's answered yet?

## Chapter Twenty-Three – The Goblet of Fire

Harry, Hermione, and Ron wrapped their cloaks tighter around themselves as they followed Hagrid and the Beauxbatons students up to the school. They were about halfway up the lawn when Harry stopped, breathing heavily, and wheezing. He kicked the ground angrily from the burning pain in his chest.

Ever since the Quidditch World Cup he'd had problems with his lungs. He hadn't noticed it for almost a week, when he was late for class with Hermione and was running and then he suddenly couldn't breathe. Hermione had helped him to the Hospital Wing where they had found out that the prolonged and multiple-exposure to the Cruciatus Curse, coupled with the many other curses he had been hit with, had damaged his lungs. It wasn't as bad as it had been for the first month of school, but he still got winded every so often.

"You alright there, Harry?" Ron ask as he noticed his friend wasn't beside him anymore. Hermione stopped and turned as well.

Harry took in a deep breath and straightened slightly from his slouched over position. "Yeah, you two go on, I'll catch up."

"No, we'll wait," Hermione said and Harry smiled slightly at her as he tried to catch his breath.

"Alright, 'Arry?" Hagrid asked in concern as he came jogging back to the trio. "Didn't mean to take off on ye three."

"I'm fine, thanks Hagrid, just a little winded," Harry said as he was finally able to breathe properly again. "We can go now, wouldn't want to be late to the Halloween feast."

"Who do you suppose will be the Beauxbatons' champion, Hagrid?" Hermione asked.

"A real toss up that, Hermione. Several of them have a good shot at it, but Madame Maxime seems to be favoring Miss Delacour," Hagrid answered gruffly as they walked.

“Bet you Krum will be the champion for Durmstrang,” Ron said as they entered into the school.

“There is a good likely hood of that, Ron,” Hagrid agreed and then disappeared into the Great Hall.

As the three took their seats at the Gryffindor table, Hermione turned to Harry. “When we were in first year, you said something about the Triwizard Tournament, how’d you know about it?”

Harry gaped at Hermione, he couldn’t believe she remembered that. “Umm, I read about it,” Harry said turning to the feast in front of him. “Most exciting to have it be here isn’t it?” he mumbled and Hermione looked at him strangely but then shrugged and turned to her own food.

As the plates were cleared away, Dumbledore stood. “Well the goblet is almost ready to make its decision,” said Dumbledore. “I estimate that it requires one more minute. Now, when the champions’ names are called, I would ask them please to come up to the top of the Hall, walk along the staff table, and go through into the next chamber.” He indicated the door behind the staff table as Harry rolled his eyes, as if it weren’t obvious with there being only two doors in the hall. “Where they will be receiving their first instructions.”

As Dumbledore waved his wand dramatically and all the candles were extinguished leaving only the lights in the pumpkins and the blue glow from the Goblet of Fire, Harry relaxed at his seat, content that his name would not be coming out of the goblet this year. With Remus and Sirius still in the position of Defense and with the knowledge that the Dark Lord had returned, security had been upped significantly for the tournament. Harry’d been unconscious for the start of term feast, but he’d heard much about Dumbledore’s serious talk. There was no probable way that his name was coming out of that goblet this year. It was simply not feasible.

“Any second,” Lee whispered two seats away and even though Harry already knew who the champions were going to be, he was swept up in the anticipation with everyone else and gasped along with them when the flames turned red and spit forth the first name.



Dumbledore caught the slip of paper and read it using the limited lighting. "The champion for Durmstrang," he read, in a strong, clear voice, "will be Viktor Krum."

Harry clapped along with everyone else as Ron yelled over the applause. "No surprises there!"

Harry watched Krum retreat into the next chamber and turned his attention back to Dumbledore as the goblet once again turned red and spit forth another name.

"The champion for Beauxbatons," said Dumbledore, "is Fleur Delacour!"

"It's her, Ron!" Harry teased his best mate as Fleur got to her feet and swept up the aisle and along the staff table to the next chamber. Ron blushed several shades of red and smacked Harry playfully on the arm.

"Oh shut up, I'm telling you, she's part Veela," he said and Harry laughed. He'd teased his friend relentlessly since the girl had arrived the day before.

"Looks like Hagrid was right, but look at the others, they're all disappointed," Hermione said over the applause and pointed to the rest of the Beauxbatons students.

Harry snorted at the display two of the girls were making as they sobbed with their heads on their arms. Honestly, having gone through the tournament, he really didn't get the appeal of being in it and he'd stated several times over the last month that he in no uncertain terms wanted to ever partake in the Triwizard Tournament. Just so there was no confusion, he even made it a point to do so in front of all the Heads of Hogwarts and the Headmistress and Headmaster of the other two schools the night before, much to Snape's amusement.

One of the girls in the Beauxbatons group smiled and batted her eyes at him and Harry nervously smiled back. "Looks like you've got yourself a girlfriend, mate," Ron teased and Harry blushed and turned back.

"That's just what I need, a crazed fan girl following me around," Harry muttered to himself, thinking about some of the boy-who-lived fan girls... and boys... he'd managed to pick up in his tenure at the school. Hermione chuckled and pat him on the arm consolingly.

Harry was so busy thinking to himself he didn't notice that the hall had fallen silent again until another slip of paper was thrown from the goblet. Dumbledore caught it. "The Hogwarts champion," he called, "is Cedric Diggory!"

Harry clapped just as loudly for Cedric as he did for the other champions, not that it made any difference in comparison with the Hufflepuff's enthusiastic applause that went on for some time, until Dumbledore finally made himself heard again.

"Excellent!" Dumbledore called happily as at last the tumult died down. "Well, we now have our three champions. I am sure I can count upon all of you, including the remaining students from Beauxbatons and Durmstrang, to give your champions every ounce of support you can muster." Harry smiled, of course he would; he intended to give Cedric many hints. "By cheering your champions on, you will contribute in a very real –"

Harry's smile faded completely as he glared hatefully at the goblet, which had just turned red again. "No," he whispered. A flame shot out and bore another piece of parchment.

Dumbledore reached out and grabbed it. He held it out in front of him and stared at the name written upon it. Harry prayed it wasn't his name. There was a long pause, during which Dumbledore stared at the slip in his hands, and everyone in the room stared at Dumbledore, none more intently than Harry.

Dumbledore cleared his throat. "Harry Potter."

"Shit!" Harry breathed and banged his head on the table in front of him. He lifted his head after a few moments. "I didn't put my name in," he said quite loudly so that everyone could hear him. A cricket could be heard in the Hall it was so quiet. Harry slowly got to his feet,

without prompting. He walked up to Dumbledore and then continued to walk past him, he turned just before he reached the door to the next chamber. "If I die in this tournament," Harry said quite clearly and rather melodramatically. "I'm going to come back and haunt the person who put my name in for the rest of eternity!" With that said, Harry swept from the Hall, everyone gaping after him.

Harry plopped down in front of the fire where the other three champions were standing. "Hi," he said lightly and then stared into the flames. The other three just stared at him.

"What is it?" Fleur asked after a moment of silence. "Do ze want us back in ze Hall?"

"Nope," Harry answered, not looking up. "I'm the fourth Triwizard Champion," Harry announced bitterly before Bagman could, who'd just come into the chamber.

"What?" Cedric and Viktor asked at the same time.

"Oh, vairy funny joke," Fleur chuckled with a smile on her face.

"Oh, I'm not joking, ask Mister Bagman. My bloody cursed name just came out of the Goblet of Fire!" Harry said acerbically. "Isn't it just wonderful?"

"But evidently zair' 'as been a mistake," she said contemptuously to Bagman. "'E cannot compete. 'E is too young."

"Don't tell him that, it doesn't matter," Harry said before Bagman could answer. "Bloody magically binding contract and all that rot. I have to compete!" Harry said snidely and then stood up as Dumbledore, Crouch, Karkaroff, Madame Maxime, McGonagall, Snape, Sirius, and Remus all came into the chamber. McGonagall closed the door behind them. Snape was at Harry's side in two seconds, Sirius and Remus right behind him.

"Are you alright, Harry?" Snape asked gently.

Harry smiled brightly, and Snape, Sirius, and Remus all took a step back. "Oh, I'm fine, Professor," Harry said in a chipper voice and then dropped the smile. "Of course I'm not alright!" Harry shouted and everyone jumped and turned to him. "I was already nearly killed by the Dark Lord, do you really think I want my life in danger again!"

"Did you put your name in the goblet, Harry?" Dumbledore asked calmly, once Harry had fallen silent.

Harry looked Dumbledore straight in the eyes. "No," he answered clearly. "And no I did not ask an older student to put my name in for me! Why would I want to be in this tournament? I'm not even physically fit enough, I still can't breathe when I over exert myself!" Harry said and to make his point he took in several deep wheezing breaths and coughed lightly before sitting down breathing heavily. He had over exerted himself.

"I believe him, Headmaster," Snape said as he placed a hand on Harry's shoulder. "Harry would not put his name in the goblet. This tournament could very well do what the Dark Lord did not at the World Cup. He is my apprentice and I do not want him to compete."

"I'm afraid he has no choice," Crouch suddenly said. "The rules are quite clear. Harry Potter must compete in the Triwizard Tournament."

Harry dropped his head into his hands. This was just bloody fantastic!

--

Harry sat in Snape's office much later that night. He hadn't yet been back to the Gryffindor common room and didn't plan on returning until well after everyone had gone to bed, if at all, he just didn't want to deal with them.

"If I invoked the rights of Protector, the school will Protect me as long as I stay on the grounds," Harry argued. They had been discussing ways to keep Harry safe during the tournament as they didn't know who put Harry's name into the goblet.

“And you run the high risk of invoking the Darkness of Hogwarts as well,” Snape reminded.

Harry looked at the floor. “We don’t know that, I had to use a blood ritual to do that last time, it could still be dormant,” Harry said quietly.

“Do you really want to risk that?” Snape asked seriously.

Harry shook his head and sighed. “No.”

A knock came at the office door and Snape got up to answer it. Harry was just as surprised to see Dumbledore on the other side as Dumbledore was to see him sitting in Snape’s office. “Harry, what are you doing here so late?”

“Contemplating suicide,” Harry joked. Dumbledore didn’t smile. “Okay, sorry, bad joke... I didn’t want to face Gryffindor yet.”

Dumbledore nodded in understanding. “Mind if I come in?” he asked Snape and then walked in before the man could say yes or no.

Snape mouth ‘by all means,’ behind the older man’s back and rolled his eyes as he closed the door. Harry smiled at the man’s antics, as always amazed at how different he could be from the Snape Harry knew in the past. Dumbledore conjured up his own plush chair and sat down as Snape took his own seat.

“Why do you always do that?” Harry couldn’t help but ask, he’d always wanted to know.

“I’m an old man, Harry, as much as I’d rather not admit it. I have a rather bad back and it’s safer for me to use my own chair,” Dumbledore answered pleasantly and then pulled out a tin. “Lemon drop?”

Harry nodded and took one. “I love these things,” Harry said with a chuckle as he plopped the sweet into his mouth. “Even if they are infused with a mild calming draught.”

"As do I, Harry, but how did you know?" Dumbledore asked, his eyes twinkling.

"Oh, I can taste it," Harry replied simply.

Dumbledore chuckled. "You certainly have a way with potions, now if only we can get Severus here to like them as well, or at least try one," Dumbledore chuckled and held out the tin to the potions master.

"I'd prefer not, thank you for asking though," Snape declined as politely as his countenance would allow.

Dumbledore shrugged and winked at Harry. "Worth a try." Harry smirked back. "I'm actually glad you're here, Harry, I was going to discuss this with Severus tonight and then bring it up to you tomorrow, but as you're already here..."

"What is it?" Harry asked uncertainly.

"When you were a baby, before your parents were killed you were prone to bouts of rather high levels of magic, adult levels of magic. This happens to many Wizarding children who start to show signs of magic before the age of three. It's a higher level of accidental magic. Your parents weren't quite prepared to handle these bursts of magic so they had me place a magical block on you until the time that you could handle them yourself," Dumbledore explained.

"I-I have a block on my magic?" Harry asked slowly.

"Yes. It is perfectly natural for parents of magical families to place blocks on their children. Neville Longbottom has one as does your friend Ron. Their blocks will be lifted when they are fifteen." Harry blinked at Dumbledore, not knowing what to think. Snape just gaped at Harry. "You have shown a remarkable control over your magic and have shown that you can control high levels of magic as you have done so many times over the past years. Your parents wanted the block to be lifted when you were fifteen, but I believe you are ready to have it lifted now, and it may help you with this tournament," Dumbledore said pleasantly.

“Exactly, how much magic is this block holding back?” he asked, thinking incredulously of the amount of power he had as an adult and his magic was still blocked? And why hadn’t he had it unblocked the last time? Or had he?

“Quite a bit,” Dumbledore said, eyes twinkling, and then he looked at Harry, really looked. “Are you alright?”

“Fine. I’m just curious, exactly how powerful will I be when I’m an adult?”

“That’s hard to say, but I can tell you that you are a very powerful wizard, Harry, without your adult magic,” he said and Harry stood from his seat and ran his hand through his hair. “Are you sure you’re alright?”

“Yeah, just trying to take everything in, it’s been a long day.”

“I’ll say,” Snape whispered.

“So, what say you, would you like me to unblock your magic?” Dumbledore asked.

Harry took a moment before nodding slowly. “Sure, why not?”

A/N: Anyone think his name wasn’t going to come out of the goblet?

## Chapter Twenty-Four – An Unexpected Turn of Events

An explosion and Harry ducked as pieces of debris scattered around the Room of Requirement. He was still holding his wand pointed at the target as he doubled over laughing. Snape dropped his shield and walked forward as he waved dust out of his face.

“Maybe I shouldn’t have had Dumbledore unblock my magic. That was a Tickling Charm!” Harry laughed from his spot on the floor.

“Perhaps you should use that against the dragon,” Snape said with amusement in his voice.

“The object is to get the egg without hurting the dragon or getting yourself – myself – killed,” Harry reminded as he took in a deep breath, coughing a bit and dragged himself up from the floor. “I might as well do the same thing I did the last time and summon my broom. I can always out fly the dragon again.”

“Indeed, but we really should be working on getting your magic under control. If a Tickling Charm just did that, I don’t want to know what a Summoning Charm would do.” Harry nodded in firm agreement and required another target.

Con conversationally, Harry asked, “So, how did it go again with Dumbledore unblocking your magic?” In honest truth, Harry was dying to know.

“It was all fine,” Snape shrugged nonchalantly, crossing his arms over his chest.

“Oh, come on, it’s been weeks, please tell me,” Harry practically begged. He’d asked five times now and each time he got a different, evasive answer. He was beginning to suspect that the man was keeping him on edge about it for his own amusement.

Snape chuckled. “Resorting to begging now, Potter?” he asked, an eyebrow raised in amusement. Harry gave him a withering glare. “Alright I suppose it couldn’t hurt to tell you...” Harry smirked. “After



you've gotten your magic under control." Harry scowled, he hated incentives.

"Fine." This shouldn't take long, all he had to do was reevaluated the power he put into his spells. Harry aimed his wand at the target. "Stupefy," he said quietly.

An explosion shook the room and Harry blinked at the target, or rather lack thereof, and at the wall behind it, which had recently been whole, but was now crumbling.

"I think I broke the Room of Requirement," Harry said seriously when the wall didn't right itself right away.

Snape was doubled over and shaking with silent mirth.

Harry glared at him sheepishly. "Alright then, less power."

Snape started to laugh harder and Harry couldn't help but crack up as well.

A few longer than he had anticipated hours later and Harry was pretty confident that he had his magic under control. Or at least he hoped so, or Transfiguration on Monday may be a bit disastrous for him as Snape pointed out.

He was dead on his feet as he'd spent the majority of the night practicing every spell he could think of so he'd know how much magic to put into the spell. But he hadn't forgotten as he looked over to Snape.

"Alright," Snape sighed when Harry turned and glared at him expectantly. "I do believe that you remember the slight discomfort associated with unblocking your magic." Harry nodded, snorting quietly at his choice of words for the rather high amount of pain he associated with it, every time, this time not excluded. "Well I had to fake that I was feeling that pain, yes?" Harry nodded again, slightly confused. Snape smirked. "He seems to think I've built up an amazing pain tolerance. That I might even be able to withstand the Cruciatus Curse."

Harry raised his eyebrows incredulously. "You didn't..."

"Not a twitch, just stood there. I tried to grimace, really, but honestly I was trying to keep from laughing because of the perturbed look on his face. He was so shocked and confused. I don't think I've ever seen more confusion in the man's eyes. I nearly broke down when he tried to reason it all out," Snape laughed.

Harry shook his head and chuckled. "I really must see a pensive memory of this and one day, Dumbledore must as well!"

--

Harry dragged himself up the stairs to his dormitory from the Gryffindor common room some time later. It was almost dawn and Harry was exhausted. He really felt wiped. He hoped to get at least a couple hours of sleep. At least he didn't have class in the morning, it being Sunday and all.

Of course his plans were waylaid. He felt like he had just shut his eyes when Ron was pouncing on his bed and shouting at him. "Come on, Harry, get up! Before Hermione comes up here and drags you down herself and I really won't stop her this time, mate. She's getting scary!"

Harry groaned and shoved his head under his pillow. Ron snagged the pillow away and Harry pushed his face into his sheets instead. "Ron, really, I just got to sleep an hour ago," Harry mumbled into his bed.

"Yeah, where were you all night anyways? The guys aren't happy with you, they think you're going to lose points for us again. Not to mention that you didn't tell any of us how you put your name in the cup."

Harry sat up and rubbed a hand over his eyes and then put on his glasses, resigned that he wasn't getting back to sleep. "First of all, I didn't put my name in that bloody cup, Ron," Harry said with slight annoyance.

Ron waved his hand. "No I figured you didn't, though whoever did must have some sort of death wish, cause you're probably going to kill them when you find out who it is."

Harry nodded in agreement and yawned tiredly. "Second," he continued. "Dumbledore decided to unblock my magic last night. Thought it would give me an advantage, I was up all night relearning how to control it with Severus," he said tiredly. Ron gaped at him. "What?"

"Unblocked your magic?" Ron asked, still staring at him.

"Yeah, you know, something my parents had put on me when I was a baby," Harry yawned.

Ron seemed to sag. "Oh, that. I almost thought you meant..." Ron shook his head. "Never-mind, crazy thoughts."

Harry hid a smirk at what his friend was thinking because he'd already done that. Then he rolled his eyes when Hermione barged into their dorm. "Morning, Hermione," Harry said with a false chipper voice.

"You're still in bed?" she asked incredulously.

"Ah, give him a break, Hermione, Dumbledore took his baby block off him last night, he's all tuckered out," Ron said, sniggering slightly.

Harry glared at Ron. "If that's what one calls a baby block, I'd like to see a full one," Harry grouch. "It was bloody painful!"

Ron seemed to pale a bit. "You don't think when he does mine that it's going to hurt, do you?"

Harry shrugged. "I don't know, don't think so though. Dumbledore said that he was surprised mine caused me so much pain. I guess I had a lot of magic packed into the block, it certainly took me long enough to adjust afterwards."

“Really, that’s fascinating, tell me everything!” Hermione exclaimed jumping onto Harry’s bed and looking at him like he was an interesting sort of insect. Ron was right, she was getting scary.

“Yes, fascinating,” Ron grumbled, looking much better after Harry’s reassurance. “Well I’m heading down to breakfast. You coming with, Harry, or you going to have a lie in?” Ron asked, rolling his eyes at Hermione who was bouncing up and down waiting for information.

Harry shrugged. “Nah, I’m up now, might as well stay up,” Harry said as he dragged himself out of bed. “I’ll meet you in the common room,” he said. Harry chuckled at the crestfallen gleam in Hermione’s eyes. “And then, Hermione, I will tell you whatever you want to know.” Hermione beamed and jumped off Harry’s bed to follow Ron. Harry shook his head, grabbed his towel, and headed to the bathroom.

Harry tiredly got out of the shower and looked in the mirror at the jagged scar on the side of his face, that though it had been nearly two months, was still rather visible, but was finally starting to fade, it looked like. He had his towel wrapped around his waist and he could clearly see several other scars still visible from his brief time at the Dark Lord’s mercy; including the burn scars that took up the majority of his right hand. Madame Pomfrey had told him that no amount of magic would remove scars that deep. So his hand looked like it was partially melted, he was just glad that he had full use of his hand, even if it was an ugly sight.

“Voldemort’s really done a number on me,” Harry whispered to himself and then his eyes widened. Harry started when there was no pain, none, and then he said it out loud again hesitantly. “Voldemort... HA! Take that I’ve beaten you magically!” Harry shouted at the mirror.

That was the only thing he could think of, he was more powerful than Voldemort so his curse was over powered! “Voldemort,” Harry said again, just for kicks. “Voldemort, Voldemort, Voldemort! Ha ha ha!” Harry laughed giddily and then he froze when he saw Ron standing in the bathroom doorway staring at him.

“Oh, umm.” Harry quickly grabbed his pajama shirt and pulled it on, but it was too late, Ron had already seen.

“Merlin, Harry,” Ron whispered, his face pale and his eyes fearful. “You have the Dark Mark.”

“Ron, I can explain,” Harry said quickly, walking towards his friend.

Ron suddenly bolted out of the bathroom. Harry was about to run after him but then he realized that he was still only half dressed. He hastily returned to the dormitory and changed in record time, before he made his way down to the common room. Ron was nowhere to be seen, but Hermione was sitting by the fire as if she were in shock.

Harry slowly walked towards her, no one else was in the common room. “Hermione?” Harry suddenly backed up several paces when she stood and pointed her wand at him. Harry raised both his hands. “Whoa, Hermione, please, put your wand away. I can explain,” Harry said, a bit of desperation coming to his voice.

Hermione didn’t lower her wand. “Explain then,” she said with a shaky voice, though her wand was held firm.

“First of all, Dumbledore knows,” Harry said quickly and Hermione lowered her wand only slightly. “I woke up with it the summer before second year, please believe me, it’s the truth.”

Hermione stared at him a moment longer before she slowly lowered her wand. “Why were you laughing You-Know-Who’s name?” Hermione asked shakily.

Harry half smiled as he lowered his hands. “The curse is gone, I can say his name again.”

“Oh, that’s good. Oh! We should stop Ron before he tells the whole school!” Hermione suddenly exclaimed.

Harry was out the portrait-hole before Hermione could blink and she was on his heels soon after. Harry was so worried about what Ron was going to do that he didn’t notice that he had shoved Sirius out of

the way in his haste, and Hermione stopped to help his godfather back to his feet. He arrived at the Great Hall just as Ron was entering it.

“Ron!” he yelled.

Ron spun around and drew his wand. “You stay away from me!” he shouted. Oh, of course this grabbed the attention of everyone in the Great Hall, including the professors.

“Ron, please, I can explain,” Harry said, breathing heavily and holding out both his hands in front of him. “You don’t understand, you don’t have all the facts, please, just let me explain.”

“Fine, explain,” Ron growled, not lowering his wand.

“Not here, Ron, please, let’s just –”

“NO! You will explain now, here in front of everyone, why Harry Bloody Potter has the Dark Mark branded on his left arm!”

Harry closed his eyes tightly and let his arms fall to his sides as the hall gasp in horror at Ron’s words. He opened his eyes, tears in them. He couldn’t believe Ron would do this to him without having all the facts, Harry’s eyes suddenly hardened into glacial orbs, but he should have expected it. After all everyone else had betrayed him at some point, why not Ron too?

“I’ll explain,” he said in a cold voice after a moment of staring at his so-called best friend. “I’ll explain that Voldemort has taken it upon himself to make my life as miserable as he possibly can! I’ll explain that it wasn’t enough that he killed my parents because of a stupid prophecy made by a barmy seer. No! He had to make sure that he ended my life too! But because of sheer dumb luck I keep surviving! So instead of just torturing me in front of hundreds of fully trained Wizards who just stood there and did nothing, he has to find other ways to torture me as well!” Harry took in a deep breath. Tears were streaming down his face now. “Are you happy, Ron? Are you happy now that I’ve explained? Well ANSWER ME!” Harry screamed when Ron just stood there, his wand hanging limply in his hand.

“Harry, I’m...” Ron whispered.

Harry shook his head, clenching his fists. “Don’t apologize, Ron, I’m sick of apologies. That’s all I ever get. Well you know what? I’m sorry. I’m sorry I ever survived! I’m done,” he said quietly and then turned and ran out of the Hall.

Ron stood stock still staring at where Harry had disappeared out the doors. He looked at Snape as the man ran down the length of the Hall. “I...” he began when he saw the rage in Snape’s eyes.

“You stupid boy, do you have any idea what you’ve just done,” Snape seethed and then ran after Harry, hoping the boy hadn’t gotten it into his head to actually do anything rash.

--

That was exactly what was going through Harry’s mind as he stood in Myrtle’s bathroom with a knife in his trembling right hand. He looked up at his reflection as he slowly brought the conjured knife down to his left wrist again, intending to cut to the vein this time, but he stopped and took in a deep breath and then dropped the bloody knife into the sink.

Harry shakily slid down to the floor and forced back his sobs as he brought his knees to his chest and wrapped his arms around them. Why was he doing this? Harry shook his head, he really had no clue. He didn’t want to die. So Ron had betrayed him, so what? It’s not like he’d never been betrayed before, and Ron was just angry, he had no idea that he wasn’t a Death Eater. He saw the mark and freaked. Harry probably would have done the same...

Harry closed his eyes. But that was it, that’s were Ron and him were different. Harry would have let Ron explain had their roles been reversed, he certainly wouldn’t have made Ron explain in front of everyone like that, no matter how rash he was.

And now everyone knew and...

A pounding suddenly sounded at the locked door to the bathroom. "Harry, please open the door," Snape called urgently through the door.

Harry sniffed and stood up, using the sink as support as he held his left arm against him, stanching the blood. It hurt, a lot more than it should, and he was afraid he may have cut too deep too many times, but there really wasn't a whole lot of blood, at least not as much as he thought there should be.

Harry was about to walk over and unlock the door when he stopped and stared at his reflection, certain he couldn't be seeing what he was seeing. He took a step closer and then jumped back in fear. "That's impossible," he whispered to himself. He closed his eyes tightly and then opened them again, his reflection...

"Harry, open the door!" Snape yelled. "Please at least answer me."

Harry stared back at his reflection as relief flooded over him, for a moment he thought he had seen Voldemort looking back at him through his eyes. He shook his head and swayed a bit, now certain that he had lost more blood than he'd thought, especially when he actually took in the sink that he'd dropped the knife in.

Harry breathed deeply before he passed out and then he walked over to the door and unlocked it with the flick of his wand. He stood back when Snape came in and he leaned tiredly against one of the sinks. Snape took in the good amount of blood in the nearest sink and then gently pulled Harry's arms away from him.

"I couldn't do it," Harry whispered. "I couldn't kill myself."

"These are really deep, Harry," Snape said with concern and fear in his voice.

"I know, Severus, I... I think you should catch me..." Harry suddenly fainted and Snape caught the boy before he could hit the floor.

Sirius abruptly barged into the bathroom. "What the hell happened?"



Snape took in a deep breath, to calm himself. "He fainted," Snape said staring down at the boy in his arms worriedly, this was certainly a very bad unexpected turn of events.

--

Harry was back in the Hospital Wing, but this time he didn't care. He sat back in his bed, biting his fingernails as he looked around the empty ward. For the first time in a while, he wished that he had never been brought back to the past.

Because Ron had announced that Harry had the Dark Mark in front of the majority of Hogwarts, news didn't have to spread quickly to get out of the school. The fact that Harry had the mark was now rumor though, thanks to a really powerful concealment charm. Of course, that didn't stop the ministry from barging into Hogwarts demanding an explanation when they found out.

Harry was currently listening in on a rather lengthy explanation going on outside of the Hospital Wing doors. "So you see, Minister," Dumbledore finished. "Harry does not have the Dark Mark, what young Weasley saw was his over active imagination," Dumbledore finished lying to the minister all to cover Harry's ass, and he didn't even know about the concealment charm Harry had put on the mark.

"I would still like to see for myself," Fudge answered back.

Damn, Harry sighed as the Hospital Wing doors opened. He had yet to actually see Dumbledore since he had passed out from shock and blood loss. He really didn't want to deal with Dumbledore's disappointment in him, so avoided his eyes when he came in. Instead he looked to the minister. "Alright," Harry said quietly, not even trying to hide that he was eavesdropping. "But please promise me that what you're about to see won't end up in the Daily Prophet."

Fudge looked curiously at the boy. Dumbledore stared down at him as well as he came to stand by Harry's bed. "Of course, I swear, it will stay between us." Harry hoped so. He'd ask the man to make a magical oath, if he hadn't been the Minister of Magic.

Harry didn't look at Dumbledore as he pulled his arms out from under his blanket and then pulled back the sleeve on his left arm. There was indeed no Dark Mark, but the numerous fresh and old slashes across his arm were quite visible as Harry couldn't conceal them and the mark, as he'd tied the concealment charm into the mark itself. Fudge stared at the boy's arm as if he didn't believe what he was seeing.

Dumbledore had put his head in his hand, just now taking in the severity of what he'd been told a short while ago by Sirius and Severus. Dumbledore finally looked up at the boy. "Harry, you said you'd stopped," he said sadly.

"I did," Harry said quietly. "For a while, but I've started again. Severus knows, as does Sirius... and Ron, if he puts it all together," Harry sighed.

Fudge looked like he was in shock as he stared at Harry while he recovered his arm. "How long has this been going on?" he suddenly asked. "And your guardians have done nothing to stop it?"

Harry shook his head. "My guardians don't know," he said quickly before Fudge blew a gasket about Muggles allowing this to happen to their savior. "Really, only a few people know."

"Dumbledore, there are spells that help children with these sorts of problems, how can you have let this go on?" Fudge demanded.

"What spells?" Harry asked. "No one's said anything about spells that would help me!"

"Those spells Cornelius, take away the personality of the child and takes away their free will. They aren't any better than the Imperious Curse and I will not have them be used in my school, nor on my students," Dumbledore said sternly. "Harry is a strong, brave young man, who has been through too much in his short life. With any other child, cutting would be the least of our worries. Harry will get over this, I assure you."

Harry felt like striking the headmaster. This was not something to get over or push aside. He had come very close that morning to actually killing himself! The cuts he had inflicted on himself were far deeper than he normally would have cut as it was. And he still didn't know why he did it, as much as Snape and him had discussed it.

"Are we finished here, Professor Dumbledore? I'm sure Minister Fudge has many more important things to be getting on with," Harry said with only a slight strain in his voice.

"If the minister has nothing more to discuss with you –"

Fudge turned to leave before Dumbledore could finish, but stopped beside Harry and put his hand on his shoulder. "I understand, Mr. Potter. Believe it or not, I was once in your shoes. If you would like more information about those spells, I would be happy to provide it. They helped me through a very troubling time in my youth, and I know it's not something you get over." Fudge glared at Dumbledore when he said this. "Take care, Mr. Potter."

Harry nodded, rather shocked by what the man had just revealed. He looked back at Dumbledore. "I know I should have told you," Harry said evenly, though his nerves were anything but calm at the moment.

"Yes you should have."

The Hospital Wing doors opened and Harry looked up to see Hermione standing alone in the doorway. "Hello, Harry, Headmaster, mind if I come in?"

Harry shook his head, glaring slightly at the Headmaster, as if daring him to say no. "Come in, Hermione."

Dumbledore nodded at Hermione and then left the Hospital Wing. Harry sighed as he closed the door behind him, he knew this wasn't over. No doubt the Headmaster would be back, looking for an explanation that Harry couldn't give.

Hermione walked over and sat down on the side of Harry's bed. She didn't say anything for a long time and Harry was just about to ask

what she was doing here when she looked up to him. "I sort of know what you're going through, Harry. Well not entirely, but I can relate. My cousin used to cut himself. I was his outlet, the one he came to when he had the urge. When I went away to Hogwarts he lost the only person who stopped him from doing something stupid. I wrote to him, but it wasn't enough," Hermione whispered as tears slid down her cheek. "Last year, he committed suicide while I was away at school."

Harry stared at his friend unblinkingly as she looked down at her hands, tears still falling from her eyes. He'd had no idea. He reached out and took her hand and she looked up to him.

"Please, Harry, stop this, I don't want to lose you too. I can't lose you." She choked on a sob and Harry pulled her against him and wrapped his arms around her tightly.

"You're not going to lose me, I promise. You won't lose me," Harry said firmly, deciding then and there that he was never going to cut himself again, even if he had to tell the whole school about his problem.

The two sat in silence for a long time, uninterrupted by anyone. By the time the Hospital Wing doors opened again Hermione was asleep in Harry's arms and Harry was close to following her. His head jerking up awoke her and she sat up so quickly that Harry had to grab her before she toppled off the bed.

"Evening Professors," Harry said calmly as he righted Hermione as Snape walked into the ward, followed by Sirius and Remus.

"Evening, Harry, Miss Granger."

Hermione nodded back, blushing and not looking at the professors. "I should be going. If you want to talk, Harry, I'm here," she said as she scooted off the bed.

"Thanks, Hermione, and I'm sorry about your cousin," Harry said and she squeezed his hand once before leaving the Hospital Wing.

A/N: Sorry these chapters haven't been put up in the last week, I've been a bit busy with stuff, but I'll try and get as much up as I can before I get busy again. :)

## Chapter Twenty-Five – The Wand Weighing

The next week wasn't all that bad for Harry. Though the Daily Prophet had come out with a story about Harry having the Dark Mark, the minister quickly countered it announcing that Harry didn't have the mark. Thankfully no mention of his problem found its way into the stupid Wizingard Newspaper. The school had pretty much turned against him as it was, but there was also some sympathy for him going around. The Gryffindors on the other hand were backing him nearly a hundred percent, once Dumbledore announced that it was impossible for Harry to have put his name in the goblet.

Ron had apologized, several times, but Harry hadn't yet accepted. Hermione was undecided about the whole thing. She wasn't sure if she should be mad at Ron as well. Ron had been upset and angry, but Harry felt that he could have waited for an explanation. Hermione had finally decided not to get caught in the middle and started sitting with Ginny at meals and studying alone. Though whenever Harry was around, she watched him carefully. Many watched him carefully.

Harry had just gotten out of a charms lesson, where he noticed Ron was having a bit of trouble with the Summoning Charm. Harry thought about forgiving him and helping him out in class, but before he knew it the class was over and his thoughts moved on to the wand weighing that he'd be attending after lunch. He'd already decided that to deal with Rita Skeeter he was going to have to reveal his knowledge of her insect Animagus form. He just hoped she didn't question how he knew.

Harry walked into the Great Hall and saw Ron sit down next to Hermione. Harry frowned and took a seat a ways down next to Neville. Harry was half way through his lunch when Hermione sat down next to him. Harry was a bit surprised by this as she hadn't sat next to him during a meal in quite a few days.

"Harry, you're really good at the Summoning Charm," Hermione began. Harry nodded, not really getting what she was getting at, after all the witch had perfected it almost right off. "I think Ron's having trouble understanding what I'm trying to show him and you always have a way of explaining things better –"

“Hermione, if Ron wants to learn how to do a Summoning Charm then he can go ask Professor Flitwick,” Harry said irritably.

“But you’re right here, and Ron’s apologized, many times. Please, can’t you just give him a chance to –” Harry again cut off the witch.

“Explain, Hermione? Yeah, I’m going to give him a chance to explain, like he gave me a chance, right Hermione!” Harry spat harshly and got up from the Gryffindor table, more than done with his lunch, now that several students were staring at him.

“Don’t be so mean to her, Harry,” Ron suddenly said as he saw the look on Hermione’s face. “She’s just trying to make you see that I’m really sorry.”

“Shut up, Weasley,” Harry growled and then stormed out of the hall.

Though Harry understood that Hermione didn’t want to take a side between her two friends, he was a little put out that she seemed to have given up on him and sided with Ron. Harry, a bit irritated, found himself heading down for Double Potions automatically. He was about to walk into the Potions classroom when Draco suddenly grabbed his robe sleeve and pulled him down the hall a ways.

“Malfoy, what the hell!” Harry started, he wasn’t in the mood to deal with Draco Malfoy at the moment, even if they were on slightly civil terms.

“Shut up a second will you!” Harry shut up, taken back by the urgency in the blonds voice as he looked up and down the still deserted corridor. “I just wanted to warn you. My father’s coming today to the weighing of the wands. Something about needing a ministry official, but I think it’s a load of crap. I heard some mention about your wand just before school started –”

“Wait a minute, you knew my name was going to be put in the cup?” Harry nearly growled.

“No, no I only put it together afterwards and then when I heard my father was coming...”

“Oh, sorry,” Harry said as he took in a deep breath. “Thanks for letting me know.” Harry started to walk off but Draco grabbed his robes and pulled him back.

“Look, my father’s been acting very out of character this summer. It’s like he’s got some sort obsession with you. Just before classes started he was going on and on, talking to himself about going against the Dark Lord’s wishes just to get his hands on you. Though I’m not in any position to go against him, I just thought I’d warn you. My father can be a very dangerous man when he gets like this. I know because I’m usually sent away by my mother when he gets like this.”

Harry looked back at Draco with more than enough understanding. He decided he better take Draco’s warning to heart, if anyone would know Lucius Malfoy, it was his son. Harry looked down the hall. He remembered how much of a bastard Lucius Malfoy had become. It wasn’t a good thing when the man turned his entire focus on you. Harry had garnered his entire focus once. Voldemort had actually come to his rescue. He hadn’t thanked Voldemort or anything as he was being held captive by the man at the time, but it was the only time he’d come close to it. “I’ll be wary of him. Thanks, Draco.”

“No problem, I think he may try and curse your wand or something –”

“Hey, Draco, what are you doing with Potter?” Theodore Nott shouted down the hall. Harry looked over his shoulder and scowled as he saw that the Potter Stinks badges were starting to make circulation. “Showing him the new badges?” Nott and the other Slytherins laughed.

“I had nothing to do with it,” Draco whispered before he walked away with them as they went towards the potion’s classroom. “Yeah, they’re a riot, Nott,” Draco laughed sarcastically.

Harry smirked and rolled his eyes. Maybe there was hope for Draco Malfoy yet. Harry started back toward the classroom himself.



Hermione was coming down the hall at the same time and Harry sighed as she brushed passed him without looking at him. Maybe he shouldn't have been so harsh with her at lunch. He'd have to apologize after class.

"Hey, Granger, want one?" Nott sneered as the Slytherin girls started to laugh.

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Oh, very funny," Hermione said sarcastically as the badge showed POTTER STINKS. "No," she stated with a huff and started to walk into the classroom, but Nott blocked her way.

Harry had his wand out in the blink of an eye. "Leave her alone, Nott," he growled.

"Or what, Potter, are you going to curse me?" Nott asked snidely as he pulled his own wand out.

"Don't tempt me, Nott. Let her pass, now," Harry ordered as he glared at the boy.

Nott sneered, but lowered his wand. "She's not worth it anyways, are you Mudblood?"

Hermione surprised everyone as she suddenly punched Nott in the face. Nott grabbed at his bleeding upper lip and nose. "You should learn to watch your mouth," Hermione bit out.

"Why you little – Densaugeo!" Nott spit out and as Hermione was right beside him, she got a face full of the spell.

"Hermione!" Harry and Ron yelled. Harry barely glanced at Ron as they both made their way over to the girl who was looking, not panicked as Harry thought she should be, but murderous. Harry immediately put himself between her and Nott, almost fearing for the boy's life. He'd seen what Hermione could do when angry, even if it was her future self.

“I think I’m going to go to the Hospital Wing,” Hermione said rather calmly, though her voice was muffled from her hand and her growing teeth.

“Want one of us to walk with you?” Ron asked.

Hermione shook her head. “I’ll be fine,” she muttered out, though she still sounded very angry.

Harry let her go, but for Nott’s safety, though he didn’t know why he even bothered, he stopped the boy from following her. “Wait a few minutes. She can be really scary when she’s angry,” he said quietly. And maybe it was the near fear in Harry’s eyes, or just his Slytherin preservation kicking in, but Nott waited and then slowly made his way out of the dungeons.

Harry glanced at Malfoy and was amused to see that he was trying not to laugh at the other Slytherin. They all filed into the classroom and had just taken their seats when Snape swept in. He looked around a moment.

“Where’s Granger and Nott?” he asked.

Malfoy snorted but Harry answered with a chuckle. “Nott’s slinking his way up to the Hospital Wing and Hermione’s getting her teeth fixed.” Draco laughed out loud then and Harry couldn’t help but laugh as well. The look of utter fear on Nott’s face was rather amusing as was seeing Hermione hit him.

Snape rolled his eyes and didn’t bother asking. “Right, Antidotes!” Snape began class and Harry and Draco stopped laughing as the class was looking at them funny now.

Not too long later and a knock sounded at the Potions classroom door and then the door opened to reveal Colin Creevey. “It’s the weighing of the wands, Professor,” Harry said before Colin could speak. “As much as I’d rather not go...”

“Go,” Snape said. “Mr. Weasley will fill you in later –”

“That’s alright, sir, I’ll be back soon,” Harry said and then got up and left the room. Ron stared guiltily after him and Snape frowned.

“It’s amazing isn’t it, Harry?” said Colin as soon as Harry had closed the door.

“No not really,” Harry said, before Colin could say anything more. “I’d really rather not be in this tournament.”

“Right, sorry, Harry,” Colin said a little more subdued as they walked towards the classroom Harry was needed in. “Good luck,” he said and he left Harry there when they arrived.

Harry entered the room. Immediately spotting Rita Skeeter and her photographer. The other three champions were already there and Fleur was having fun using her slight Veela powers on Rita’s cameraman, who’d just snapped a picture of her.

“Is this going to take long,” Harry said as Bagman approached. “I have Potions class and we’re going over antidotes. I think it’s rather important I be there, seeing as I’ve been poisoned in the past.”

“Always the scholar,” Skeeter chirped. “Apprentice to Severus Snape and now youngest Triwizard Champion, absolutely amazing. I’m Rita Skeeter, reporter for the Daily Prophet. Mind if I have a word with you before we start?”

“No, and that’s all you’re putting in the Prophet about me, Miss Skeeter. In fact, it might be less than that. I don’t like reporters and I certainly don’t like insects like you,” Harry smirked as Rita backed up a pace.

“Understood, Mr. Potter,” she said as she glared at him. “Of course, Severus would have told him,” she muttered under her breath as she went to harass the other champions.

Harry raised an eyebrow. Snape knew about Rita? That’s something he definitely had to find out about later. Harry waited for the others, impatiently at best, he just wanted to get this over with. He was leaning against the wall when the door suddenly opened and in

walked Lucius Malfoy with his arrogant sneer in place. Harry tried his best not to react as Malfoy swept his eyes over Harry.

“Potter,” he hissed ever so slightly.

“Malfoy,” Harry said jovially, with a brilliant smile. If Malfoy thought he was going to get a rise out of him, he was very mistaken. “How’s life been treating you? Dobby doesn’t say hello, unfortunately he’s a bit distracted by happiness.”

Lucius’ eyes narrowed and Harry was almost concerned that the elder Malfoy was going to hex him right there, but then the others entered into the room. Harry smirked nastily and then pushed himself off the wall to greet the headmasters and headmistress, as well as Mr. Ollivander.

Harry waited impatiently for the others to have their wands inspected by Ollivander. Too be honest, Harry was bored out of his mind and was rather startled out of his thoughts when Bagman announced to see Harry’s wand. Harry released it from his holster as he got to his feet, brushing passed Lucius, who was eyeing the wand intently, and placed the wand on the table in front of Ollivander.

“You aren’t having any more troubles with your wand, Mr. Potter?” Ollivander asked, not touching the wand. Dumbledore looked between the two curiously.

Harry smiled sadly. “No. Thank you, Mr. Ollivander. You were right, it wasn’t the wands fault.”

Ollivander nodded and then picked up the wand to inspect it. He took a long while and then finally waved it and a fountain of wine shot out of the tip. “Excellent condition, Mr. Potter. Remember, of course, that the wand chooses the Wizard,” Ollivander reminded and Harry smiled a small smile. “I see great things in your future.” Harry nodded and Ollivander placed the wand on the table and Harry picked it up and placed it into his holster again. Lucius frowned calculatingly at that and Harry smirked as he moved passed him again.

“Thank you all,” said Dumbledore, standing up at the judges’ table. “You may go back to your lessons now – or perhaps it would be quicker just to go down to dinner, as they are about to end –”

Harry didn’t need to be told twice and he smirked as he could here Rita curse under her breath as the other champions followed Harry’s lead. As he had said that he would be back in Potions, Harry went in that direction, nodding to the other champions going in the other direction as they got to the Entrance Hall. Besides, he wanted to ask Snape about Rita. First of all, how did he know her, and second how did he know she was a little bug? He knew it would prove to be a most interesting and entertaining story.

Harry was busy thinking of the possible reasons why Snape would know Rita Skeeter as he walked down into the dungeons. He’d just gotten down to the bottom of the stairs and was passing by the first of the unused potions classrooms that Snape and him used sometimes for some of their extra lessons, when Lucius suddenly came up behind Harry and pushed him roughly into an empty classroom. Harry pushed himself off the desk he’d hit and quickly moved to release his wand but Malfoy was quicker and Harry’s arm fell limply to his side as a curse came in contact with it. He went to grab with his other hand as he backed up but Malfoy grabbed his arm painfully and pushed Harry up against the desk.

“No one makes a fool of me, Potter!” Lucius hissed.

Harry couldn’t believe Malfoy had the guts to attack him in school, but Harry’s thoughts quickly turned to the wand Lucius now had pointed at his temple. Harry’s breath hitched, he was so stupid to have let his guard down with Malfoy in the castle.

“I could bring you to the Dark Lord right now and watch as he snubs out your pathetic life, but then where would the fun in that be for me?” Lucius ran his wand down the side of Harry’s cheek.

“Let me go, Malfoy, or today will be your last day on earth,” Harry bit out harshly with a bit more nerve than he actually had. Harry was suddenly starting to feel light headed, but he pushed passed the dizziness to glare at Lucius.

"I very much doubt it, Potter. But whether you are alive when I get through with you depends on if you scream," Lucius hissed into Harry's ear and then Harry's eyes widened when he was suddenly turned around and shoved down painfully against the desk.

Harry started to struggle, but he suddenly felt really weak and that was when he noticed the tip of Lucius' wand glowing and his vision started to blur and dark spots darted before his eyes. Harry started to panic when Lucius pulled up Harry's robes and a hand made a move for his trousers. "No!" Harry screamed weakly again trying to struggle when a rushing sound seemed to come to his ears and then he dropped off the side of the desk, as if boneless, when Lucius suddenly released him.

"Get your hands off of my son!" Harry heard shouted and then he heard a scream of agony.

Harry looked up through his returning vision to see Dumbledore rush into the room and then Snape's face was in front of his wavering vision. "Harry, are you alright?"

Harry took in a deep breath and then another as nausea swept over him. "Y-yeah, I fine," Harry forced out as he glared at Malfoy, still slightly twitching on the floor, and had the overwhelming desire to pull out his wand and curse him himself. The only thing that stopped him was Snape's hand on his shoulders. Harry forced himself to look away before he did follow through with his impulse to kill the blond Death Eater. He looked back at Snape. "How did – ?"

"Marauder's Map, Black lent it to me, and it's a good thing he did," Snape glared over his shoulder. "You are really alright?"

Harry nodded, swallowing tightly. "Yeah, but I think I'm going to be sick."

A/N: And next up lions, and snakes, and dragons, oh my!

## Chapter Twenty-Six – The Dragon Wizard

Though Harry didn't show it outwardly, he was a little more than shaken by Lucius' attack on him. He couldn't get it out of his mind what would have happened had Snape not been watching the Marauder's Map. The same thing that would have happened had Voldemort not stopped Lucius as well.

Harry new Severus' and him had reached that of a father – son relationship, but hearing Severus call him his son was completely a surprise to Harry. He was happy about it, but at the same time, he'd been so long without any sort of parental figure that he didn't know how to react to the whole thing.

Because of this and many other things, Harry found himself spending many nights in the Chamber with Mort rather than in the Gryffindor dormitories. He noticed that spending time with Mort and Slytherin's Library staved off his urge to cut himself. He'd thus far kept his promise to himself and though sometimes his urge was nearly overwhelming, especially after his nightmares, he'd not cut himself since Hermione had told him about her cousin.

Harry found himself in the Chamber more often than he was in the rest of Hogwarts. Whether or not anyone had noticed this, Harry wasn't certain as no one had said anything about it, in fact no one had spoken much to him since the attack. The whole ordeal with Lucius had been pretty much swept under a rug. Harry didn't know what had happened to Malfoy, he assumed he was in Azkaban, but he didn't care, as long as he was nowhere near him.

Harry had withdrawn into himself in the couple weeks since then. He really hadn't talked with anyone, including Snape, and even in classes, he only talked when called upon and always with a detached indifference. He'd even stopped doing his extra lessons with Snape. Snape was getting rather annoyed by that, but then Harry couldn't bring himself to care one way or another. He really wished that he could just turn off all his emotions as it was taking too much effort to not do something rash again.

It didn't help that his nightmares had increased as well, but instead of his past memories haunting him, it was that one moment over and over, of Lucius' hands on him, and the helplessness he felt as he tried to struggle against him. Harry had never felt so powerless before. He couldn't even fight back and every time he thought about it, he felt physically ill.

And something in the back of his mind kept nagging at him as well and he was finally starting to believe it. No one had even tried to talk to him about what had happened or how he felt and he was beginning to seriously believe that the Dark Lord was right and no one truly cared. At least about anything that didn't have to do with Voldemort.

Harry took in a deep breath as he stared at the pages before him. It was the night before the first task and Harry was yet again in the Chamber with Mort when he should be sleeping. Harry had a book open in front of him, but he wasn't reading it. He'd had a really nasty dream a couple of hours before and to be honest he was really nervous about the first task the next day. After all, he'd be facing a Dragon, and knowing his luck he'd be facing the Horntail again.

"You have been staring at that page for an hour," Mort hissed suddenly.

Harry looked up. "I know, I'm a bit nervous about facing the Dragon tomorrow."

"You will be summoning your broom tomorrow, yes?" Harry nodded. "You are a strong wizard and will be alright."

Harry took in a deep breath and then looked at his watch. "I should really get going before they notice I'm missing." Harry stayed where he was though.

"You should talk about it. You humans have a way of bottling things up until it festers so much that you do something rash. Salazar was the same. Us serpents say what we want, why can you not?" Mort suddenly hissed rather bluntly.



Harry looked up at the Basilisk and then down at the book in his lap. "You are right. We do. I just can't believe how powerless I was against Malfoy. At least with Tom, even though I've generally lost, I was able to fight back. I couldn't even do that. I don't even want to think about what would have happened had Severus not been watching the map."

"Perhaps it is time you invoke the rights of Protector." Harry looked up at Mort again. "I know you have fears about this darkness of Hogwarts, but you are strong. You have a will that is more powerful than any other wizard I have ever known, even Salazar. I do not believe you will succumb to this darkness. It is simply power, nothing that is uncontrolled can be called dark, or light, it simply is. It is what you use it for that makes it either."

Harry stared at Mort. Perhaps he was right. Had he had the power of Protector, the school would have protected him against Lucius. But he'd had a taste of the dark current of power that ran through Hogwarts, could he really resist not becoming like Voldemort or any of the other Protectors? He wasn't so sure.

Harry looked away from Mort. "I'll think about it," he hissed and then closed the book he was not reading.

Harry had just stood and picked the heavy book up to put back on one of the shelves in the library when he noticed a piece of parchment sticking out of the top of it. He hadn't noticed it before because it was only just sticking up from the pages and was the same color.

Curiously, Harry opened the book to the page the paper was serving as a bookmark for. His eyebrows rose when he saw the subject matter. "Hey, Mort, know anything about Dragons?" Harry asked as he held up the bookmarked page that showed a pictured chart. "Because apparently you are one of them."

Mort looked over the chart that showed different Dragon species and a Basilisk was definitely one of the species. "I think that is me," Mort commented wryly.

Harry turned the book around to look for himself. He looked from the Basilisk in front of him to the picture. "Huh, I think you're right." The book was by Salazar. "You think I can become one of these Dragon Wizards? In a night?" Harry had a gleam in his eyes as he looked back up to Mort and Mort seemed to look back at him incredulously.

--

Harry was exhausted; not just physically, but mentally. He must have been mental to think that he could become a Dragon Wizard, as the book called them, in one night. He had only just been able to form the magical connection with Mort and he still had a splitting headache from it, and that had only been thirty minutes ago. Needless to say, he was sticking to his original plan of summoning his Firebolt.

Harry was on his way from the Chamber to Gryffindor Tower, to take a quick shower before grabbing some breakfast, when Cedric Diggory came running up to him. "Potter, as it was your friend that told me, I thought you should know that the first task is Dragons."

As Harry was rather shocked that Cedric had just told him about the first task, his expression was spot on for someone who wasn't suppose to know what the first task was suppose to be. "Dragons? I stand by what I said when my name came out of that blasted goblet. If I die I'm haunting the person responsible for all of eternity!"

Cedric just stared at him amusingly. "Right, anyways, I'm off, though I am thinking of skiving off my class this morning. Too nervous to sit through it."

"I'm with you there," Harry said as Cedric left him in the hall.

Harry turned back to continue on his way when Hermione suddenly ran up to him. "There you are! Harry Dragons, the first task is Dragons!"

"I know, Hermione, Cedric just told me," Harry said calmly. Harry figured the Witch in front of him was probably panicking enough for the both of them.

“Harry, I know what I did was really stupid, and I know you’re not ready to forgive me, but Mate, you have to listen to me! The first task is Dragons!” Ron suddenly exclaimed, running up to Harry and Hermione. He was rather pale and Harry almost had to take some pity on him. Ron had been trying to talk to him for the last couple days. He knew his friend, who he was still slightly mad at, was only trying to warn him about the Dragons, but Harry just couldn’t bring himself to be bothered to listen.

“Yep it is,” Harry said. “Now if you’ll both excuse me, I’d like to go take a nice long shower before I’m torn apart by a Hungarian Horntail.”

“Wait a minute, how’d you know one of them was a Horntail?” Ron asked.

“Oops,” Harry said under his breath. “Umm, Hagrid! Hagrid pulled me aside and yeah, Hagrid!”

“But you just said Cedric just told you,” Hermione said.

“Right, he did! Got to go,” Harry took off down the hall, his two friends looking after him strangely.

--

Before Harry knew it, the time had passed, and he found himself standing with the other three champions waiting to find out what their first task would be. He felt just about as he had the last time he had to face this task. At least he knew his plan would work, as he’d done it once before, he didn’t think the others could say the same thing though. All of them looked a little green when it was time for them to put their hand in Bagman’s purple silk sack.

Fleur, pulled out, as expected, the model of the Welsh Green with the number two. Harry was almost hopeful though when Krum, instead of pulling out the Chinese Fireball, pulled out the Swedish Short-Snout. But when Cedric reached his hand in and pulled out the Fireball, Harry’s hopes crumbled. Looks like big, nasty, and ill tempered was

his task again. Harry reached in and pulled out the Hungarian Horntail with the number four.

As soon as the mini beast had finished stretching out its wings, Harry felt almost a sort of calm come over him. The dragon was rather beautiful. It was just too bad that according to the book he'd read last night that the Horntail was one of the hardest to gain a taming connection to, which was probably why the dragon handlers had such a hard time with her. Harry knew he'd never be able to do it, especially because he barely maintained a connection with Mortedolv, and the Basilisk wasn't fighting against him. Harry was just glad he had his Firebolt.

Harry barely listened as Bagman prattled on and went and sat down to wait for his turn, before Bagman had a chance to pull him aside to give him pointers. Harry sat, stoking the small dragon with his finger, as he looked down at the model, studying it intently. He looked up briefly when a whistle blew and Krum this time went out first.

"Good luck," Harry called, and Krum nodded before he left the tent.

Cedric paced back and forth in the tent and Fleur was looking more and more nervous by the minute. When it was finally Fleur's turn, Harry wished her luck as well. He already knew that Krum was going to beat the other two, as he really didn't take long to get the egg.

Fleur left and it was just Harry and Cedric. Cedric continued to pace as Harry stayed sitting where he was, still petting the little model Horntail and then finally, it was Cedric's turn. Harry looked up at him. "Good luck, Cedric," Harry said, just as he had said to the others.

Cedric looked back at him. "You too, Harry," he said and then left the tent.

Harry stood and pocketed the model Horntail. He breathed deeply as he paced the tent, clearing his mind with his Occlumency skills and calming all of his remaining nerves. Suddenly the whistle sounded and Harry realized that it was his turn.

Harry walked out of the tent and the little ways to the enclosure. As Harry stepped inside, he glanced at the crowds through his fringe. He didn't bother looking over at the Hungarian Horntail, as he knew exactly where she was. Harry dropped his wand from his holster.

"Accio Firebolt," Harry said clearly and strongly and waited... and waited. Shit, it wasn't coming. "Accio Firebolt," Harry said a little louder with a bit of desperation. But again it didn't come. Harry could tell that the crowd was practically holding their breaths, waiting to see what Harry would do.

"What's he waiting for?" Harry heard Bagman say to the crowd and Harry began to hear snickers and jeers from them as Harry continued to stand there numbly.

Harry took in a deep breath, plan B, if this didn't work, he'd probably be dead. This was going to give him a splitting headache. Harry stepped further into the enclosure and waited until the Horntail glared at him and he glared right back, continuing to walk forward as he cleared his mind of everything. Without looking he waved his wand over his left hand, showing a symbol of a sketched circle with a Dragon, which looked much like the Horntail in front of him, within it. He held up his hand toward the Dragon in front of him as the Dragon growled in warning. The only warning he was going to get.

"Draconis Magus Sapientia," Harry said clearly and a glow formed around his hand, stemming from the symbol. Harry could feel the connection form between him and the Dragon and the power he felt from her was like nothing he'd ever felt before. He'd never even gotten anything close to this from Mort. "I am a Dragon Wizard, calm before me," Harry commanded, his voice hard, but quiet.

Harry's head was starting to pound and it took just about everything he had not to break the connection when the Dragon before him suddenly let out a fierce roar and then an irate female voice sounded throughout the enclosure, heard by only him.

"Why should I human?"

Harry took in a deep breath, and pushed back the pain in his head, focusing on the power flowing through their connection, he didn't lower his hand even an inch as he walked forward even more. "I wish you no harm. One of you eggs is not your own, all I seek is the one that sparkles of gold."

The Dragon seemed to quell for a moment as she looked down at her clutch, she let out another roar, that nearly drove Harry to his knees, but Harry clenched his teeth and kept the connection, this was his life on the line after all and if he could make friends with a basilisk, why not briefly calm a dragon?

"Lord Dragon Wizard, have your egg," she said fiercely.

Harry kept his hand raised and the connection with her as he slowly moved forward and picked up the golden egg at her feet, being very careful not to disturb the rest of her clutch. Harry felt very insignificant standing beside such an amazing creature. He was in awe of her power and his respect for dragons grew immensely. Harry backed away quickly, clutching the golden egg as he did, and then once he thought he was at a safe distance away, he bowed.

"I thank you Lady Dragon, your mind is your own." Harry clenched his fist and the glow dissipated, as well as broke the connection between them. Harry with a small smile, quickly got out of the enclosure with his prize. He couldn't believe he had just done that!

Harry could vaguely hear Bagman go on and on about how Harry had gotten his egg the quickest and most clever way out of all of them, over the roar of the crowd. But he was rather busy ignoring all that as he laid down on the ground, clutching his egg. His head was killing him, but he was still in wonder at the power he had felt through the connection. And he suddenly realized what he would love to do for a career if he lived passed the age of seventeen.

McGonagall, Snape, Sirius, Remus, and Hagrid suddenly came running up to him. "Harry, are you all right?" Snape asked and Harry started laughing. The others looked at him as if he'd lost his marbles, and maybe he had!

"That was so bloody cool!" Harry exclaimed and then pushed himself to his feet. "I had no idea the connection was going to be like that. The power I felt from her was absolutely amazing! No wonder Charlie loves working with dragons!"

"Where did you learn that spell, Harry? I thought only Dragon handlers knew about that," Sirius asked.

Harry shrugged, and looked at Sirius. It was true after all. "Came across it in the Library last night, didn't think I'd ever be able to do it though. It was the first thing that popped into my mind when my first plan failed."

"Well come along, Mr. Potter, Poppy's going to want to check you over, though I think you're the only one who doesn't have a scratch on him," McGonagall announced with a small smile.

"Why did your first plan fail?" Snape asked quietly as the rest walked ahead of them.

Harry shook his head and then stilled it as his head started to pound more. "I don't know, I don't understand it, my broom was laid out on my bed and the window wide open when I left the dorm," Harry answered with a curious glint in his eyes. Snape looked puzzled as well.

Harry walked with the group over to the first aid tent. Poppy took one look at him, shook her head, and walked away. "It's got to be that Potter luck," Harry heard her mumble and he forced down a snicker.

"Madame Pomfrey, I could use a headache potion," Harry said hesitantly. He didn't want her to get all worked up about possible internal injuries. The Medi-Witch turned on him with narrowed eyes. "It's just a headache, not a scratch otherwise, honest."

"Sit," she ordered. And Harry sat, not about to argue with her. "Dragons... last year Dementors, year before, Basilisks... what will they come up with next..." Madame Pomfrey growled as she went to a table and plucked up a vial and returning, handed it to Harry.

Harry thanked her and gulped down the potion. His head stopped pounding almost instantly. Hermione and Ron at that moment darted into the tent. Harry was too much on a power high to be mad at Ron when Ron grinned nervously at him, Harry grinned back.

"Your brother must love his job if that's what he feels every time he connects with a dragon!" Harry said smiling.

Hermione suddenly burst into tears.

"Hermione, there's nothing to cry about, I'm fine!" Harry said reassuringly but rather bewildered, he still didn't understand girls.

"You two are so stupid!" she shouted at them, stamping her foot on the ground, tears streaming down her cheeks as Ron and Harry just stared at her, stunned. Then she hugged both of them and ran out of the tent, now howling. Ron and Harry staring after her still.

"Barking mad," Ron said, shaking his head. Harry nodded in agreement. "C'mon, Harry, let's go see what your scores are." Harry nodded again and still clutching his egg, followed Ron out.

Harry half listened as Ron prattled on about what Krum, Fleur, and Cedric had done to get their eggs. Harry was still in awe at the power he had felt. It was almost like being in the dark current of Hogwarts, but pure, untainted. Amazing really.

Harry waited for his scores to appear, trying to remember what he had gotten the last time, but the details were beginning to become fuzzy, in fact much of his past was fuzzy to him now. He remembered major events, but a lot of the little stuff he couldn't remember clearly and some not at all, just that the event had happened.

Madame Maxime raised her wand into the air and gave him a nine. "Not bad!" Ron said as the crowd applauded. "Probably didn't give you full marks because you're not Fleur."

Barty Crouch came next and gave him a clear ten, Harry smirked as Ron's jaw dropped and the crowd cheered. And then came Dumbledore who again gave Harry a ten and Ron thumped Harry on



the back as the crowd cheered harder than ever. Bagman also gave Harry another ten and Harry allowed a smug smile, after all he'd earned it this time.

Karkaroff raised his wand, he paused for a moment, a look of sheer disgust on his face as he looked down at Harry with something akin to near respect and acceptance. He shook his head and a nine came out of his wand.

"HA!" Harry shouted, pumping his arm into the air.

"What?" Ron bellowed furiously. "Nine? You lousy, biased scumbag, you gave Krum ten!"

"Of course, I'm not Krum," Harry countered and Ron laughed.

A/N: Anyone wondering what happened to Harry's broom?

## Chapter Twenty-Seven – Yule Time Greetings

On his way to lunch after Defense Against the Dark Arts class three weeks after the first task, Sirius sidled up next to his godson, a playful glint in his eyes. Harry glanced sideways at his godfather. “So, Harry, who you going to the ball with?”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Not you too? What I suppose you want to ask me as well,” Harry joked with a smirk on his face as he kept walking.

He’d been asked by no less than ten girls and one guy to the ball and Harry was starting to think that he’d actually have to say yes to one of them. There was one girl, Melisande, from Beauxbatons, who had been relentless in asking him since the ball had been announced. Harry was most certainly never going to say yes to her. She reminded him of Umbridge to an extent. All prim and proper and always turning her nose down at everyone not of pureblood. Which confused him as he wasn’t pureblooded. She’d been following him around since Halloween. She was pretty enough, but there was just something about her that had Harry very much wanting to stay clear of her.

“Absolutely, I mean who wouldn’t want to go to the ball with the ‘Best Looking Bachelor at Hogwarts?’” Sirius said while unrolling a copy of Witch Weekly that had Harry’s face plastered on the cover.

Harry stopped and snatched the magazine from Sirius’ hands. He glared at it. “All ready!” he exclaimed as Sirius looked at him oddly. “I mean, I’m only fourteen,” Harry added on hastily.

Sirius ruffled his hair, laughing. “Doesn’t look like they care, kiddo.”

Harry scowled and smoothed back down his hair, rather unsuccessfully, as he started to walk again. Harry stuffed the magazine in his robes and sped up his pace as he passed a gaggle of giggling girls. He already had enough of them asking him to the damn ball, he didn’t need that lot asking him as well.

“So?” Sirius asked after they had passed the girls.

“I think I might go alone,” Harry said loftily.

"Hate to break it to you, but you might have a bit of a problem dancing the opening dance alone," Sirius said with amusement.

"Who says I can't just pick a random girl out of the lot. It's only the first dance after all, and then I can leave. No need to be there for the whole thing."

Sirius stopped in his tracks. "You seriously haven't asked anyone!"

Harry shrugged his shoulders. "Maybe I have, maybe I haven't," Harry said with a smirk and then entered into the Great Hall, leaving Sirius staring after him incredulously.

"So, Harry, have you asked someone yet?" Ron asked as Harry sat down at the Gryffindor table. What did he have a sign on him saying 'ask me who I'm going to the ball with?' Harry thought.

"Actually, Ron, I have," Harry said quietly as he served himself.

Neville looked up from his meal with interest. This was the first sign of Neville taking an interest in anything related to Harry after the First Task. He'd been keeping his head down around Harry. He blamed himself and apologized almost every time they were alone together. Neville had thought that someone in the dorm might tamper with his broom, left out on his bed in plain view as it had been, so had locked it into Harry's wardrobe, thinking he was helping. Harry kept insisting that it was alright but Neville never seemed to hear him properly when he said it.

Ron looked at him expectantly. "Well..."

Harry rolled his eyes. "Well, I'm not telling, isn't it obvious by my utter lack of response?" Harry said with a smirk while helping himself to food.

"You spend way too much time with Snape, Mate," Ron said good-naturedly. "But really, who you going with?"

"I guess you'll just have to find out at the ball, because I'm not telling," Harry said evenly as Hermione joined them. Hermione quietly huffed at that.

"Still not telling, are you?" Hermione asked.

Ginny looked at Hermione disbelievingly as she sat. "You mean you haven't wheedled it out of him yet?"

"You've got a bet to see who I'm going with haven't you!" Harry exclaimed and several people at the Gryffindor table suddenly became really interested in their food. Harry stood up. "Alright!" Harry shouted. "Who else is in on this bet?" he asked the table.

Suddenly half the Hall including several staff members became very interested in other topics of conversations. Harry's mouth dropped open and he sat back down abruptly. He couldn't believe they were all betting on him!

He looked with narrowed eyes between Hermione and Ron to determine which one of them had set up this bet and then his head turned to the Weasley twins. He quickly ruled them all out though as he calmly got up and walked to the staff table, straight to Professor Severus Snape, who raised an eyebrow at him.

"Who are the candidates?" he asked simply.

"What makes you presume that I have any idea what you're talking about?" Snape asked back.

Harry stared back at Snape. "Are you telling me that you are not the one who has instigated this apparent school wide bet, Professor?"

"No, I did," Snape said simply and took a sip of his tea. He put his teacup to the side. "That is not what you asked. You asked who the candidates are, I don't know what you're talking about. There are no candidates, the bet is simply how long it would take you to ask someone, and I hadn't intended it to be school wide."

"It may have been upgraded, Severus," Sirius said. Snape and Harry looked down the table at him. "Not by me," he added quickly, with their rather too alike glares leveled on him.

Harry raised an eyebrow and then looked at Remus. Remus calmly took a sip from his goblet and then got up from the table. "I do believe I'm done, and look at the time..." he trailed off as he started to move from the table.

"Hand over the list," Harry said simply before Remus could get too far. "Come on, I only want to see who's on it, make sure you're not all betting on me uselessly." Remus reluctantly handed a roll of parchment over to Harry. Harry chuckled as he unrolled the rather long scroll and looked down the list and then he smirked. "Not there," he said and handed back the list and then left the Hall, everyone staring after him in amazement. More than half the school was on that list.

--

Hermione ran up to Harry in the hall. It was a little less than a week until the Yule Ball and everyone had been relentless in trying to find out just who Harry Potter was taking to the Ball, it was even splashed all over the papers, luckily not by Skeeter who had so far remained fairly silent.

"I'm still not telling," Harry said in a singsong voice.

"I know you're not," Hermione sang right back. "I was wondering if you'd made any headway with that Egg."

Harry looked around himself conspiratorially. "Promise you won't tell, even Viktor," Harry whispered with a small smirk and Hermione blushed bright red.

"How did you – never mind, tell me, please, I won't tell anyone," Hermione practically begged with anticipation.

"The clue's the Black Lake. I just have to figure out how to hold my breath for at least an hour," Harry said, though he already planned on using Gillyweed again if he could get it from Snape.

"An hour? Well, we haven't learned it yet, but the Bubblehead charm should suffice, and I'm pretty sure I saw Cedric working on it in the Library, so he's probably using it as well..." Hermione trailed off in deep thought. "Yes, the Bubblehead charm will work very well. But of course because you're not a sea creature you'll have to watch out for the Grindylows. The merpeople have domesticated them, but as you're not a merman..." Hermione finished with a nervous laugh.

"I think I can handle it. But good idea, the Bubblehead charm, I'll think about using that," Harry said as he started again on his way to Snape's office. Hermione stared after him, confused for a moment and then ran to catch up with him.

"Well, what else would you use?" she asked, following his brisk pace.

"Actually, I'm trying to convince Severus to allow me to use Gillyweed," Harry said lightly.

"Gillyweed, of course, it will turn you into a sea creature so the Grindylows wouldn't likely attack you. But why would Professor Snape have any objections about you using it? He usually lets you use anything in his potions stores."

"Yes he does, in his open potion stores, but not his personal and the Gillyweed is in his personal stores. He doesn't have a lot of it and it took him months to get it through someone in Knockturn Alley," Harry explained heavily.

"Oh, and now he's not a very popular person there is he?" Hermione commented.

Harry nodded. "I feel bad that because of me, because I made him take an oath, that he's lost some of his connections to very rare potions ingredients. Some that only exist on the black markets now. Some of the ingredients he's collected over the years on the black market have led him to some remarkable potions discoveries..."

"Yes, but Harry, think about what he'd be doing right now. He'd be spying for Dumbledore, he'd be living a life of looking over his shoulder constantly. Hoping that he didn't make a mistake that would get someone killed, or even himself. You saved him from that and now he's like a father to you." Hermione laid a hand on Harry's arm and didn't miss his slight wince, she dropped her hand. "He would not be able to be that if he were still spying on You-Know-Who."

Harry nodded. "I know," he said quietly and continued to walk on.

"Harry?" Hermione called out to him hesitantly. Harry turned. "Are you alright?" she asked with concern.

Harry stared at his best friend, the mask he'd been wearing for weeks now slipping slightly and then he shook his head with a heavy sigh. "No," he said simply and walked away. Hermione stared after him with fear in her eyes.

--

The day of the Yule Ball approached quickly but Harry Potter was nowhere to be found. He wasn't in his bed when Ron and his other dorm mates woke Christmas morning and he wasn't at breakfast when they arrived there. This was of course brought quickly to the Headmaster's attention when Ron and Hermione approached Snape to ask where Harry was and their Potions professor had not a clue. So of course a hunt was now on for Harry Potter. The problem was, he wasn't on the map and the one place Severus Snape thought he might be; he couldn't go on his own without Harry. But when he sent Myrtle down to find him and she came back with the news that only the snake was there, Snape started to panic.

An hour had passed and a large group had formed in Dumbledore's office, the official news was that Harry was definitely not in the castle nor was he on the grounds.

"Where could he be?" Hermione fretted, sitting next to Ron.

Ron shook his head. "He was there when we went to sleep and none of us heard him leave."

"You said his wand was gone, but that was all?" Snape asked.

Ron nodded. "All his clothes are still there, not even his slippers are gone. Wherever he is, he's still in his pajamas and barefooted, Sir."

"Could he have been given a Portkey, Albus?" Snape asked Dumbledore.

"I thought Portkeys couldn't be used inside of Hogwarts – Sir," Hermione pointed out hesitantly before Dumbledore could answer.

"Normally you are correct, Miss Granger, however I can provide a Portkey which can go through the wards. Miss Weasley was given one at the World Cup. But I have not made another since," Dumbledore answered both Snape's and Hermione's inquiries.

Snape was about to speak again when the fire flared to life with green flames and a head came through. "Dumbledore, Hogsmead is under attack! Potter's there and has the Death Eaters distracted, we're going in now, but we could use the help of the Order to keep back the Dementors!"

"We're on our way!" Snape said before Dumbledore could respond to Kingsley Shacklebolt.

--

Harry was in the center of Hogsmead throwing every spell he could think of at the Death Eaters that had him and several other Witches and Wizards cornered. He had no idea how he had gotten there. Well that wasn't entirely true, but he didn't know why he was sent there. He was still in his pajamas, his feet bare on the wintered stone street of Hogsmead; his hair still tussled from a sleep he'd abruptly woken from only an hour ago by the crack of Apparation.

Though he was confused and not entirely sure that he wasn't dreaming at first, he'd immediately started fighting back, but there



were simply too many of them and they had brought about ten Dementors that he was sure of. He really hoped someone had alerted the Aurors by now, he didn't want to use the power that was building up inside of him.

When Harry had started to fight back, others had as well, the last of them were in a line between the Death Eaters and several young children they had tried to get to the Three Broomsticks. Harry knew they wouldn't last much longer and the Dementors were closing in. He wouldn't be able to fight both the Dementors and the Death Eaters and he knew it wouldn't be long before Voldemort was alerted that he was there.

"Get behind me!" Harry suddenly yelled as the Death Eaters started to back off while the Dementors glided forward. Harry didn't hesitate as he brought forth a happy memory. "EXPECTO PATRONUM!" he shouted and Prongs leapt forward, scattering the Dementors, but they quickly re-converged.

Harry pulled Prongs back to him as he started to feel the effects through his Occlumency shields and the Dementors scattered again. Harry shook the screams of his past from his head and directed Prongs back towards the Dementors. Prongs suddenly disappeared as Harry was hit by the Cruciatus Curse from two sides and as his screams were ripped from his throat, screams from his past converged on him as his Occlumency shields collapsed and memories flooded his mind.

The spells weren't held on him for long, but the combined force was excruciating, the pain though was muted by the pain from his memories and then suddenly it was gone and Harry lay twitching on the ground as the world spun around him.

"Harry! Can you hear me?" Tonks? Harry forced open his eyes and looked up into the pink-haired Auror's eyes. "Harry, my name is Auror Tonks, can you move?"

Harry shakily nodded and pushed himself to his feet as he snatched his wand up from the ground angrily. He could taste blood in his mouth but he was pretty sure it was coming from his bit lip. He spat

the blood out onto the ground. He wasn't sure who it was that had cast the curses on him, but he was almost certain he'd felt it before, which meant Azkaban had fallen. Aurors had poured into the Alley and had surrounded the Death Eaters and driven off the Dementors.

Harry forced his way angrily past Tonks and through the Aurors to the now kneeling Death Eaters who all had wands trained on them. "Accio masks," Harry growled and all of the masks were ripped off the Death Eaters faces, one in particular and Harry pointed his wand at her with a spark of fire in his eyes. "Bellatrix Lestrange!" Harry spit out. The Aurors gasped around him.

Bellatrix laughed her horrible high-pitched laugh. "Why if it isn't baby Potter, how is that mutt of a cousin of mine, by the way? Still alive?"

Harry's hands still shook from the Cruciatus Curse but it was more than steady when Harry shot the Killing Curse to land inches in front of her with a whispered "Avada Kedavra." The crowd stared stunned at Harry, who was breathing heavily from anger, an anger that held no foot hold in this time, but had in his past.

"Shut up you bitch!" Harry snarled as he took a step towards the deranged women. "Your master explained to you the past?" Harry nearly hissed, his eyes darkening.

Bellatrix looked at Harry and then laughed. "Sore are we?" She said bravely, and loudly. "Still not man enough to invoke your rights as –"

Harry didn't know what possessed him but he back handed the women hard across the face and sent her to the ground with a small scream. She looked back up to him with a bit of whimper and a split lip.

"Not at all," Harry hissed.

"My Lord will kill you, Potter," Lucius Malfoy growled and Harry turned on him, his eyes taking on a red tint from the fire that was fueling his rage.

“Not before I kill you,” Harry said loudly and harshly and raised his wand again, this time at Lucius.

“Harry!” Dumbledore shouted.

Harry ignored him and was seconds from casting the Killing Curse on the Death Eater when a green light soared past him and hit Lucius in the chest. Malfoy fell backwards, his eyes staring sightlessly at the sky overhead.

Harry stumbled back and looked in the direction of the caster and was shocked to see Dumbledore with a grave expression on his face and his wand still pointed at Malfoy. Harry’s rage was complete as a gold tinge sprung into his nearly red eyes and he launched himself at the old man. “You took my revenge!” he screamed.

He didn’t make it to Dumbledore though as he suddenly stopped when he felt the Dark Lord slam into his mind and he stumbled back and clasped his hand to his scar that was literally splitting open and clenched his teeth against the pain of forcefully pushing Voldemort out of his mind.

“You may have strong Occlumency shields, Potter,” Voldemort’s voice suddenly boomed out over Hogsmead and there were gasps and screams of fear as everyone looked for the source. Harry tilted his head up and looked at the Dark Lord standing brazenly on the roof of the nearest building. “But I will break them. I made you what you are and I will break you. You are mine and mine alone to control, remember that, boy!” he shouted and then disappeared with an ear splitting crack, the kneeling Death Eaters with him.

Harry shakily sunk to his knees among the startled Aurors. Everyone was staring at him, but he did not care. Harry looked at the ground where his hands were planted and was startled when a blood stained tear landed on his hand and the pain in his head that had been building after forcing Voldemort from his mind, left him. He closed his eyes and took in a deep breath and then he forced himself back to his feet. No one noticed the gold glow that briefly showed under Harry’s palms.

Dumbledore was in front of him within seconds. "Harry, are you alright?"

Harry looked at Dumbledore. "No, I am not," he said candidly. "I'm not going to be so do not try and make me feel better with your wise words of wisdom. You took my revenge," Harry hissed angrily and then stalked away from the old headmaster, who stared after him with shock in his eyes.

A/N: Who knows what Harry did?

A/N2: Updated a couple stupid mistakes, sorry about that all, I'm really just trying to get this story out as fast as possible before I have to get back to real life again. Blah! I really can't believe I used Nocturne over Knockturn, I don't think I've ever made that mistake before. Fixed now, lol. Btw, I like alright over all right and they're both in my ms word dictionary. Anyways, back to editing more carefully, cheers!

## Chapter Twenty-Eight - Missing

It was the first Hogsmead weekend of the new term and Harry was wandering around the lake with Snape while his friends were enjoying the brisk January day in the village. He wished he could go with them, but Severus, Sirius, Remus, McGonagall and Dumbledore had all said a very severe 'no' when he had tried to leave with them that morning.

Harry wasn't happy with their decision but he accepted it. There wasn't much he could do about it anyhow. Someone had pilfered his invisibility cloak at some point that morning and as not many people knew about the cloak, he could only assume it was one of the adults and they just weren't telling him. Needless to say, Harry was a bit pissed off.

He walked briskly ahead of Snape and then abruptly stopped with his mouth hanging open when he saw Krum diving into the lake. "He's bloody mad," he whispered.

Snape caught up to him. "Does he not realize it is January?"

"He's trying to transfigure himself into a shark. He won't be able to pull it off completely but he did make it back much faster than me and had no problems with the Grindylows. Of course, I would have made it back first had I not tried to rescue all of them. I won't make that mistake again," Harry said and continued walking.

"I'm sorry I can't give you the Gillyweed, Harry, if it weren't so hard to find –"

"I said it was fine, Severus. I'll use the Bubblehead charm. It won't be a problem," Harry said without stopping.

"I know you're angry about not being able to go with your friends, but the Dark Lord is more a problem now than ever. I don't want to see you hurt, none of us do," Snape said seriously.

Harry stopped and turned. "Just tell me you didn't take my cloak," Harry said through clenched teeth.

"Your Invisibility cloak? Of course not, how long has it been missing?" Snape questioned.

"Since this morning. I know Ron and Hermione wouldn't take it, nor would anyone else in the dorms."

"You think a professor took it?" Snape asked, catching on to what Harry was speculating.

"Yes and only four other Professors know about the cloak. I know Hagrid wouldn't take it, so it was Dumbledore, Sirius, or Remus," Harry stated heatedly. "I don't care if you all want to keep me from Hogsmead, but taking my cloak is going too far. It's the only thing I have left of my father!"

"Calm down, Harry, if one of them has it, I'll find out. I'm sure there's a good reason for it," Snape said reasonably. Harry only nodded and continued on around the lake, leaving Snape staring after him with concern in his eyes.

Harry didn't want to believe that one of his friends would take his cloak, but if Severus was telling the truth about not knowing it was missing then it was likely that one of them hadn't taken it. But why would one of his friends take it without asking? He'd after all gladly lend it to them if they really needed it.

Harry sighed as he moved off the well-worn path that followed the lake and into the forest. He didn't go far, knowing how dangerous it was, but he just had to get away from the school for a bit. Harry walked to near the edge of the wards and sat down on a boulder facing a small grotto he'd seen unicorns grazing in once. It'd been a long time since he'd seen a unicorn. Even Hagrid had said that they'd been scarce since Voldemort's return.

A fluttering of wings had Harry looking to the sky and he smiled when he saw his owl flying towards him. Hedwig landed on his offered arm and held out her foot and a letter. "What's this girl, not from Dudley?" Harry asked rhetorically. Obviously, it wasn't from Dudley. It didn't

look Muggle enough. Harry opened the letter and pulled out the parchment inside.

Harry,

My aunt and mother will kill me if they ever found out, so you better not be reading this in a public place...

Harry looked around himself and then at his owl. "You won't tell anyone," Harry said and Hedwig glared at him as if to say 'of course not.' Harry smirked and continued reading, his smirk falling from his face.

While I was home for Christmas break, there was a Death Eater meeting at the manor. I was forbidden to attend by my mother, but it's my home and I know all the best places to spy. The Dark Lord wasn't in attendance, but their plans involved you. One of the Death Eaters is a spy at Hogwarts under Polyjuice Potion. Harry, you must do anything you can, not to be in the lake on the day of the next challenge; fake an injury, forfeit, something. I don't know who it is, or whom they've replaced, but I do know for certain that he or she has orders to force a Portkey on you at the next task and if they fail, they're to kill you or die themselves.

The letter wasn't signed but Harry knew who it was from, there was only one person he knew that could be that close to a Death Eater meeting and would warn him. Draco. Ever since his father's death, Draco had been withdrawn, even from the Slytherins. Harry suspected that even though he was relieved that he didn't have to go against his father's wishes anymore, he also resented Dumbledore for killing Lucius. Harry knew the feeling, but for an entirely different reason.

Harry had been fully prepared to kill the Death Eater and Dumbledore had taken away his revenge. That alone had nearly pushed Harry over the edge. He'd awakened his right as Protector two nights before the Yule Ball, but hadn't invoked the school's power yet. He'd nearly done so when Dumbledore took his revenge though. Had Voldemort not forced his way into Harry's mind when he had, Harry

would have likely killed the old man himself. That thought scared the shit out of him.

The press of course had had a field day about Harry casting the Killing Curse at Bellatrix, even though it hadn't hit her. But they had even more fun running Dumbledore's name through the mud for killing Lucius in cold blood. Dumbledore had been brought to trial, but it was declared that he was protecting Harry, that Lucius was about to curse him when Dumbledore had struck him down first. Never mind the fact that Lucius didn't have his wand on him at the time.

Harry was tired of people making up excuses for their hero's actions. Dumbledore, though he claimed it was all for the greater good, got away with far too much in Harry's opinion. Harry only hoped that if he ever turned to the more dark side of existence that the Wizarding World would finally get their heads out of the clouds and bring him to justice. Harry laughed to himself; of course, their sense of justice was a bit skewed.

Harry looked at the letter another moment and then coming to a decision, crumpled the letter up and then threw it into the air and aimed with his wand. The ball of parchment turned to ash before gravity could pull it back down and Harry got up and started back towards the castle. He was halfway up the lawn when he stopped and started back the way he had come, too late.

“Arry, zair ‘ou are.”

Harry stopped and turned back around. “Melisande,” he said coolly as he tried not to roll his eyes.

“I noticed ‘ou were not going to Hogsmead today and wondered if ‘ou wanted some company.”

Harry cringed at the very thought and the sound of her simpering voice. “Sorry Melisande, I have an apprentice meeting with Professor Snape.”



"I noticed 'ou do not call 'our Master by such, does e' not find zat disrespectful?" Melisande asked as she started to walk beside him when he went to walk away.

"Professor Snape and I have a much deeper relationship. He's like a father to me. I'd sooner call him father than master," Harry explained, wishing the girl would leave him be, or go jump off a bridge or the Astronomy tower, which ever was higher.

"But it is disrespectful to 'our Professor Snape. E' is after all, giving 'ou all his knowledge. E' controls 'our future. 'Ou call him master," Melisande went on in a highly offended way.

Harry had really had enough of her. "Look, I'm sure you're a nice girl and all, but whether or not I call Professor Snape master or not is none of your concern. He is my father in all but name and blood, he does not control my future; I do not serve him, so I will not call him master like some bloody House Elf!" Harry took in a deep breath. "Now if you will excuse me I have things to do." Harry walked away as quickly as possible.

Melisande was insufferable and had gotten worse since the Yule Ball. There was no shaking the girl off. She just didn't get the hint to leave him alone. And what was worse, Ron and Hermione teased him relentlessly about it. It was payback for the teasing he'd done to Ron about Fleur and Hermione about Krum, Harry was sure.

--

Later that afternoon, Harry was pacing the Gryffindor common room, waiting for Ron and Hermione to get back so that they could go down to dinner. He was more than a bit annoyed, Snape had talked to the other Professors and none of them had confessed to taking his cloak, Harry didn't quite believe them.

Ron and Ginny came into the common room not too long later, laughing about some sort of prank the twins had pulled on the store clerk at Zonko's. "Hey, Harry, let me throw my cloak up stairs and then we can get some dinner, I'm starving. Hey, where's Hermione?"

“Hermione?” Harry asked. “I thought she was with you.”

“She left early, saying she had some homework to get done, she said she was going to the Library with you to get it done,” Ron said and then his eyes widened. “She hasn’t come back?”

Harry shook his head. “I’ve not seen her all day and my cloak’s missing, you don’t think she took it, do you?”

“Why would she? Maybe she couldn’t find you and went to the Library without you,” Ginny said and Ron nodded in agreement.

Harry wasn’t so sure, but he followed the two down to the Great Hall not too long after. As dinner progressed and Hermione still didn’t show up, Harry became even more certain that his friend had been the one to take his cloak, but he couldn’t figure out why and it wasn’t until Neville mentioned using Gillyweed as an idea for the lake, sometime later, that Harry came to a conclusion.

“Neville, you don’t think I could get that in the forest,” he asked without making it sound as if he were about to have a panic attack.

“I don’t know, it usually grows around water sources and damp areas, but I wouldn’t advise going in there just to get it when the Bubblehead charm will do.”

Harry only nodded and then got up from the couch they were sitting at in front of the fire in Gryffindor Tower. “Where you going, Harry?” Ron asked.

“To talk to Severus about getting some Gillyweed,” Harry said nonchalantly. “I’ll be back before curfew and hopefully I can drag Hermione back with me. She’s probably asleep in the Library,” he laughed slightly and headed out of the portrait hole, Ron didn’t miss the worried glint in Harry’s eyes.

--

Ron started to get really worried when it was ten minutes to curfew and neither Hermione nor Harry had come back to the common room.

It was then that Ron remembered the conversation about the Gillyweed, and remembered that Snape wasn't allowing Harry to use it. And that is how Ron found himself wandering shakily through the Forbidden Forest with his wand pointed out in front him, hopelessly lost.

He had at first in a rare moment of genius, used the point me spell to find Hermione, but then he'd lost the spell, so he'd then tried Harry and then he lost the spell again and now he was dearly wishing he had gone to a professor, Hermione would have gone to a professor. Why oh why didn't he think like Hermione more often?

A loud crash sounded through the forest, Ron yelped loudly, and then he screamed in terror at what he saw running towards him out of the darkness.

"Run!" Harry shouted as he ran, Hermione on his back, Harry's invisibility cloak trailing behind them from around Hermione's partially visible shoulders.

Ron screamed again and ran, faster than Harry, like he had a Firebolt under his robes. Until they passed back onto the Hogwarts grounds and all the way into the Great Hall where they stopped, panting for breath.

"Well, that was eventful," Hermione said quietly, still clutching to Harry's back.

Harry turned his head to look back at her. "Don't ever do that to me again!"

"What the Hell was that?" Ron said taking in a deep breath shakily.

"I didn't mean to upset Aragog," Hermione whispered.

"Aragog, that spider has a name!"

"Actually he's an Acromantula, Ron," Hermione said knowledgeably.

“Well at least the rest of his family wasn’t chasing us as well,” Harry said dryly and Ron stared at him as if he’d gone mad.

“There are more of them!”

--

“Harry,” Severus said as Harry exited the Charms classroom with Ron and Hermione, laughing at the puce color of Seamus’ hair in front of them. He’d managed the charm they’d been working on but not the counter charm.

Harry stopped laughing and looked around until he saw Snape leaning against the wall with his arms crossed over his chest outside the classroom. He’d obviously been waiting for some time, and he didn’t look happy. “What’s up, Severus? I thought I was meeting you in your office? Is something wrong?”

Snape looked at Ron and Hermione for a moment and then turned back to Harry. “Where is it?” he asked seriously.

Several other students had stopped in the hall in curiosity, most of them Gryffindor, but many also Slytherin as they’d had their charms lesson together. It wasn’t often that Snape took that tone with Harry and everyone’s interests were piqued

Harry looked back at Snape, confused. “Where’s what?”

“The Gillyweed,” Snape sneered.

Hermione and Ron looked at Harry and then back to Snape as Harry shook his head. “I have no idea. I’m going to go out on a limb and say it’s missing?” Harry asked.

“Of course it’s missing,” Snape nearly snarled. “Why would I ask about it if it weren’t. What did you do with it?” Snape asked severely.

“Severus, I didn’t take it. You said I couldn’t use it, why would I take it?” Harry said, rather shocked by Snape’s accusatory tone.

“He didn’t take it, Professor,” Hermione stood up for Harry. “He’s using the Bubblehead Charm; he’s been perfecting it every day for the last week.”

Snape glared at Hermione and then looked back at Harry. He stared at him for a good minute. “If I find out it was you who took it...”

Harry huffed as he shook his head and then started to walk away. “Believe what you want, Professor, but I didn’t take it!”

Harry literally bumped into Remus before he could round the corner, Harry was about to apologize when Remus snapped at him. “Harry, where is it?”

Harry rolled his eyes. “If you’re referring to the Gillyweed, I’ve already gotten done explaining to –”

“I don’t care about Gillyweed, where’s the map? It’s missing.” Remus asked in a calm yet severe tone.

“The map?” Harry asked. “I don’t have it, I thought Severus gave it to Sirius and –”

“And he gave it to me, you were the only other person who knew I had it, where is it?” Remus asked again.

“Professor, if Harry says he didn’t take it, then he didn’t did take it,” Ron argued for Harry and Hermione nodded in agreement.

“You said I couldn’t use it when I asked and I’m fine with that. Besides, that was nearly a month ago, why would I take it now?” Harry asked, more than put out that he was being accused of stealing not one thing but now two.

“Mr. Potter,” Dumbledore said as he came around the corner with Madame Pomfrey. Harry looked at the severe Medi-Witch and had a feeling this was not a social call, he knew he should have replaced the potions he’d taken weeks ago during his preparation time.

Harry ignored the other two professors, turning his back on them so that he was facing Dumbledore. He took in a deep breath. "Yes, Professor Dumbledore?" Harry asked with just enough civility to seem polite.

"May I speak with you a moment?" Dumbledore asked and Harry was at least grateful that the man had enough tact to speak with him without a bunch of students around, unlike Remus and Severus.

"Certainly Professor," Harry said and started to walk away. "Your office I presume?" Harry asked.

"The Hospital Wing," Madame Pomfrey said and Harry sighed.

"Alright," Harry muttered and adjusted his course. He wasn't at all surprised that Remus and Severus followed after him. Harry looked over his shoulder at Ron and Hermione, who both looked after him with concern in their eyes. Harry shrugged his shoulders at the two.

After Harry and his entourage had entered into the Hospital Wing, Harry turned to look at Dumbledore awaiting the reason Harry was here, but Madame Pomfrey ushered him to one of the beds and made him sit.

"Harry, have you been taking Dreamless Sleep Potions from Madame Pomfrey?" Dumbledore asked seriously.

Harry looked at Dumbledore. "Yes," he said honestly.

Dumbledore closed his eyes for a moment before he looked over at the Medi-Witch and nodded. Madame Pomfrey walked over to her store cupboard and came back with a vial of clear liquid. Harry's eyes widened and he was about ready to start panicking when he noticed the slight yellow twinge to it and then he relaxed slightly; not Veritaserum.

"Please, drink this, Mr. Potter," Madame Pomfrey said as she held out the vial to Harry.

Harry didn't take it. "What is it?" he asked.

"It's a potion that detects other potions in your body," Severus responded, looking at Harry sternly.

Harry nearly laughed. "Oh, it won't work, I've not taken any potions in at least a month," Harry said seriously.

Dumbledore frowned at that. "You just admitted that you've been stealing Dreamless Sleep Potions from Madame Pomfrey, Harry."

Harry stared at the man. "No, I just admitted that I'd taken Dreamless Sleep Potion from Madame Pomfrey, when she's given it to me. I did not say I stole it from her. I've not needed Dreamless Sleep Potion in a while, and I get it from Severus if I need it. I've not even taken one in over a month. I've not needed it, because I've not dreamed. What's this about anyways?" Harry asked.

"A good amount of Dreamless Sleep has been stolen in the last two weeks," Dumbledore said gravely.

"You think I took it." It wasn't a question. Why was it everyone was accusing him of taking things he hadn't. "Sir —"

"You've not dreamed, at all?" Snape suddenly asked, looking deeply concerned. Harry nodded, not really knowing where this was going. Severus turned away from him and then sat down on another bed with his head in his hands.

Harry looked at Madame Pomfrey, who still held the vial in her hands. "What's going on?" he asked when Remus closed his eyes and shook his head, also looking away from Harry.

"Drink this, Harry," Madame Pomfrey said gently.

Harry was just about to think that everyone had cracked when he suddenly started to understand what was going on. They all thought he'd overdosed on Dreamless Sleep, that he was addicted. Harry bit his lip. He knew he should have told at least Severus. Harry shook his head. "I'm not addicted," he said quietly.

“Harry, please just drink it,” Remus, nearly pleaded.

Harry almost rolled his eyes. It was a waste of a perfectly good potion. Harry took it and downed the vile tasting potion. Nothing happened, with the exception of Harry having to force back his gag reflexes.

Harry looked back at Dumbledore. “I told you, I’ve not taken any in over a month. I can’t believe you’d assume...” Harry shook his head. It wasn’t even worth it to continue with what he was going to say.

He got up off the bed and looked for a moment at the adults who all looked both relieved and ashamed. He was about to just come out and say what was on his mind but decided against it. Instead, he shook his head again at their little faith in him and started to leave the Hospital Wing. He stopped before the doors and spun back around, anger clear in his eyes.

He took in a deep breath. “I’ve been accused wrongly of three things today,” Harry stated calmly. “First, I have no idea who took the Gillyweed, Severus, and the fact that you’d even ask me after I’ve spent the last couple months feeling guilty for ever asking...” Harry breathed out heavily. “I’m using the Bubblehead charm as Hermione explained.”

“I apologize, Harry, I shouldn’t have accused you,” Severus said quietly.

Harry nodded and looked at Remus. “I’m not the only person in this school who knows about the Marauder’s Map, Remus. I asked for it a couple weeks ago to locate Hermione, you said no, I left it at that and obviously I don’t need it anymore. Anyone else who knows about it could have taken it just as easily. Maybe you should question others before jumping to the conclusion that it was me.”

Remus nodded. “I’m sorry, Harry, you’re correct, I shouldn’t jump to conclusions.”

Harry looked at Dumbledore and Madame Pomfrey. “I’m not the only child in this school with problems and in fact my problems have lessened considerably thanks to the support I have. I’m not the only



one who needs help in this school and I would think; now more than ever, quite a few students would be in need of some dreamless sleep every now and then. Voldemort is back; perhaps you should check with some of the Death Eaters' sons and daughters for they need all the help they can get," Harry said seriously and then opened the door to leave again.

Harry stopped but didn't turn around. "Sirius once told me that I should think how I make other people feel before I act, well maybe all of you should think about how I feel for once. I'd appreciate a little more faith after all I've been through." Harry looked over his shoulder at the adults briefly and then let the door fall closed.

Harry was not so far down the hall when he saw Ron and Hermione. "We have faith in you, Harry," Hermione said quietly and Ron nodded beside her. Harry smiled at them.

A/N: More questions arisen I'm sure.

A/N2: Thanks for pointing out these little things for me to fix. I'm usually really good at catching them, but I'm rushing to get these chapters out. Normally my ms word picks these things up, don't know why it's stopped, maybe I'll have to resent the grammar check again, lol! As soon as I have this story complete I plan on going back over the entire thing when I have the time but for now I figure these things are easy to over look for most readers and don't take too much away from the story. Later!

## Chapter Twenty-Nine – The Black Lake

The day of the second task swept down on Harry rather dramatically. It all started with Harry waking up late and having only minutes to grab breakfast before he was due with the other champions. He'd been up all night, unable to sleep, even with Hogwarts' calming presence in the back of his mind.

He'd tried many times to figure out who the Death Eater was in the school, but had little success. Whoever it was had cleaned their tracks significantly. It hadn't helped that the only tool that would help Harry completely was still missing. Harry had the feeling that the Death Eater in question had gotten his or her hands on the Marauder's Map somehow which could be very bad for all of them if that were so. Harry really hoped Remus had just misplaced it or someone like Fred and George had pilfered it for pranks. He didn't want to think of the possible consequences otherwise.

He hadn't told even Snape about the Death Eater under Polyjuice. He should have, but he hadn't wanted to worry anyone when Draco's note could have very well been miss information given to Draco to terrorize Harry. Harry wouldn't put it above Voldemort to do something like that to sniff out Draco's loyalties. Harry wasn't so easily scared though; not since the World Cup. He did hope Draco wasn't caught though.

Severus had been more nervous in the weeks leading up to the Second Task than Harry, and the night before he was going to relieve the Potions master of some of his worry, but he hadn't been able to find him to tell him what he'd done just before the Yule Ball.

After being pulled from Hogwarts, by Hogwarts, to protect Hogsmead, he'd decided to fully invoke his rights of Protector, including the magic, but hadn't yet from fear of himself. He was still wary of accidentally tapping into the dark current, but he'd finally decided that having the full rights of Protector was worth it. After getting the letter from Draco, he'd completely invoked the magic and embraced it. So far the dark current hadn't been a problem. So far.

When Harry had been accused of taking the Dreamless Sleep Potion, he'd assumed and fully expected they were going to ask about the pain relief potion he'd pilfered after undergoing the effects of taking on the Protectors' powers again. Apparently they hadn't even noticed it was gone. They had found out that it was Draco taking the potions from the Hospital Wing and frankly, Harry wasn't surprised.

Harry was standing on the shore with Neville, waiting for his surrogate father. The task was about to begin and yet, Severus was nowhere to be found. Harry paced back and forth, wishing Hermione or Ron were there to calm him down, but as they were absent, he knew they were already at the bottom of the lake and Neville was doing a poor job in helping his nerves.

"Harry," Neville said quietly, stopping him. He looked around to see if anyone was looking and then pulled something out of his pocket and handed it to Harry. Harry looked in confusion at him. "Hermione told me to give this to you if she didn't see you before the task. She said she got it in the forest that night, whatever that means."

Harry opened the oily paper and his eyes widened and then he smiled. Hermione was brilliant. He looked around at Remus and Dumbledore to see them staring at him and he quickly hid the Gillyweed from sight. "Thanks, Neville, and remind me to kiss Hermione when this is all over," Harry chuckled.

Soon Neville was hustled away and Harry was lined up with the other three champions. Harry knew he couldn't let Dumbledore or Remus see him with the Gillyweed as he'd already defended himself from taking it and they'd just jump to conclusions. Harry looked out over the icy water and then just as the whistle sounded he looked back over his shoulder to see Ron, standing with Neville, cheering with the others.

Harry's mouth dropped open and he froze for a moment before noticing the others already in the water, quickly pulled off his shoes, socks, and robe. He cast the bubblehead charm and then made his way out into the water, stifling a girly scream from the icy water that felt like fire against his skin. Who's bloody idea was it to do this in February anyways!

As soon as Harry was beneath the surface he took in a deep breath and popped his bubblehead charm and stuffed the Gillyweed into his mouth, forcing it down his throat without so much as chewing. Harry was just about to give up on the whole idea before he drowned from lack of oxygen when the Gillyweed kicked in and Harry was able to breathe again through the gills on his neck.

Harry didn't hesitate and took off swiftly towards his goal. He streamlined through the water, doing a couple flips and turns for the fun of it. He stifled a laugh when he passed Krum and Fleur, who both looked shocked to see him move past so fast. The two must have decided to follow him because they both stayed not too far behind him all the way to the mermaid city and above the seaweed to avoid the Grindylows. Harry knew they wouldn't hurt him too bad because he was technically part sea creature, but he didn't want to be slowed down either.

Finally they reached the city and Harry saw Cedric entering as well not too far off. The Mermaid song rippled through the water as Harry and the others made their way towards the city. Harry smiled as he took the time to look at the Merpeople looking out from their underwater homes. The fish like people were really quite fascinating.

Harry quickly looked over his right shoulder before entering the city, he was certain he'd just seen someone else down there with them, but it must have been one of the merpeople because it was gone when he looked again. Harry shook his head and headed further into the city. That was when he started to notice something strange. He looked at the others swimming not far from him, they hadn't seemed to notice.

Harry looked around him. The merpeople were gone. Though he had seen them moments ago, they had all vanished. Harry swam quickly over to Fleur, who happened to be the closest. He caught her attention and made a motion around him, indicating the sudden lack of inhabitants.

She too looked around and seem to make a conscious decision to get out of there as fast as possible. Harry agreed and swam beside her

towards the city center. Finally they reached the city center and Harry saw Hermione, Cho, Gabrielle, and... "Severus?" Harry said but nothing came out but a big bubble.

Harry looked beside him to see Fleur miming to the other two about the lack of Merpeople. Cedric nodded and untied Cho, even as Fleur grabbed her sister and Krum, Hermione. Harry without hesitation cast a silent cutting hex, releasing Severus and started to pull him away from the mermaid city beside the others who were beginning to look as equally exposed as Harry was beginning to feel.

A dark object passed to Harry's right and Harry spun his head, but saw nothing. Harry sped up his swimming and the others seemed to understand Harry's urgent need to get to the surface as that was where they too were heading.

They were halfway back to the shore when a curse came out of the gloom and slashed Harry lightly across his thigh. The bleeding was minimal because it had just barely hit him, but Harry was more than certain it was only from lack of good aim. Harry made sure he was in front of Severus with his wand out when he saw them. There were five of them, and one of them was Melisande.

One of the Death Eaters turned and grinned at Harry through his bubblehead charm as he saw the other champions stop, each with their own missing person. Cedric was the first to take his wand out but Harry shook his head and pushed Severus towards the others. "GO!" he shouted, though nothing came out but bubbles and he quickly turned back towards the Death Eaters. Krum and Fleur took Severus and Cho and started to back away slowly at Cedric's urging.

Harry turned slightly and motioned for Cedric to go with them, but the others seeing Cedric was staying stopped as well and pulled out their wands. Harry had no choice, if it were just him, he only hoped they wouldn't tell. Harry held up his hand towards the Death Eaters and then closed his fist tightly. The Death Eaters all looked at each other in amusement for a moment before the first one screamed when his bubble popped and a gold chain of magic shot up from the depths and wrapped around him, pulling him down deeper with no remorse.

The other four Death Eaters looked around themselves and back down to the depths where not even bubbles were coming from. Another one of the Death Eaters raised his wand at Harry and another chain sprung up and then another and another until the only one left was Melisande, who looked around her in fear.

Harry stared back at the witch who was obviously using Gillyweed unlike her now dead companions. Harry felt a hand on his shoulder as he raised his hand again and saw Fleur with a pleading expression on her face. Harry nodded and sent out magic to bind the witch. Melisande fought against the ropes and glared hatefully, but there wasn't anything she could do as Harry started to force her towards the shore, following the others.

They were almost there, Harry could see the shoreline, when another curse shot at Melisande. Harry took the brunt of the cutting hex and pushed Melisande on with the others as he turned to see the Death Eater glare at Harry before disappearing.

Harry started to lag behind as exhaustion caught up to him but he was able to break the surface just as the Gillyweed wore off. He didn't expect the water to be red around him though. Cedric, Fleur, and Krum turned back just as the others woke up. Harry's vision dimmed. Fleur screamed and Cedric quickly let go of Cho and waded back into the water and caught Harry before he could slip back under the surface again as unconsciousness started to take him.

"Harry!" Severus shouted as soon as realized what he was seeing.

"Don't tell," Harry gasped out before darkness over took him and he collapsed into Cedric's arms.

--

Harry groggily awoke in the Hospital Wing with Severus sitting by his side. He looked around briefly, noticing that the ward was empty but for them. "I'm sorry," Harry said quietly, startling Severus as he noticed him awake.

"What for?" Severus asked with concern.

“Draco warned me. I should have told someone, but I thought I’d be able to find the Death Eater before...”

“You knew about the Death Eater!” Severus exclaimed angrily and Harry jumped at the reaction, wincing as pain laced through his left side.

Harry un-tensed his muscles and relaxed back in the bed tiredly. “I’m sorry,” Harry said wearily again. “I didn’t know there was going to be more than the one – ”

“You could have all died down there, you nearly did!” Severus nearly shouted. Harry understood Severus’ anger. He really should have told someone.

Harry closed his eyes. He was too tired to argue back, too upset with himself. “You’re right,” he said simply. “I could have gotten you killed.”

Severus let out a heavy breath. “Harry, I don’t care about myself, I care about you. You nearly died.”

Harry opened his eyes at hearing the raw emotion in Severus’ voice. “I killed them, all of them.” Harry blurted and Severus eyes widened. “I invoked my right as Protector.”

Severus stared back at Harry an uncertain look in his eyes. “The dark current?”

Harry shook his head. “No, I use the power of Hogwarts. I killed them and would have killed Melisande too had Fleur not stopped me.”

“She wasn’t Melisande, Harry,” Cedric suddenly said from the doorway. Fleur and Krum had also came in and closed the door behind them.

Harry looked to Severus for conformation. Severus nodded. “She’s been using Polyjuice Potion since the beginning of the year.”

"Who is she?" Harry asked, though he was mostly certain he already knew.

"Delores Umbridge," Fleur said. "She fooled even us, 'ou should not blame 'our self for not seeing through her act."

"At least ve vere able to get away, thanks to you, Harry," Krum said seriously. "You saved all our lives."

"We've decided that we're not going to tell anyone about you being the Protector of Hogwarts. Others in history may have gone bad, but we believe you are stronger than them," Cedric affirmed. "We think you should have a chance to prove that the Protectors aren't all dark."

Harry looked at the other three champions. "But I killed them," Harry whispered near brokenly.

"'Ou protected us. Zat is enough for me to know 'ou are not like ze other Protectors of history. 'Ou care about ze school and those here, ze others obviously did not," Fleur said firmly.

Severus nodded in agreement. "You didn't kill them in revenge or for some petty reason, Harry. You had no choice. They'd have killed you all otherwise. Don't start showing that Gryffindor foolishness now and believing that they would have stopped with just your death."

"I know they wouldn't have," Harry whispered. Harry looked at the others. "Thank you for sticking by me down there."

"We all may be trying to win this tournament, but that doesn't mean we'd leave each other behind to be hurt or killed," Cedric said seriously.

"Zis tournament is about bringing ze schools together, what better way is zair but by sticking together."

"Vat she said," Krum smirked.

Harry smiled slightly back.



A/N: Okay that was a bit heartfelt, don't you think?

## Chapter Thirty – Forgetting and the Imperious Curse

Harry was officially beginning to feel imprisoned within the Hospital Wing. It hadn't been a month since the second task and he was yet again back under Madame Pomfrey's care. Luckily it was only because of the undiluted Bubotuber Pus that had come in with a stack of hate mail for Hermione that morning. Harry had grabbed the one that would have injured his friend and opened it first, he'd completely forgotten about the letter, but was glad he was injured in his friends place.

He planned on writing to Rita Skeeter about her little article that she thought she could get away with because it wasn't about Harry directly. If he couldn't get her to apologize in an article to Hermione and Viktor he'd expose her Animagus form to the world with no regrets.

But right now he was getting his hands treated and couldn't write anything until he could hold a quill again. "Can I go now?" Harry asked after his hands had been treated and bandaged. He'd been itching to get away from the Medi-Witch since he'd been forced into the ward.

Madame Pomfrey narrowed her eyes at Harry but relented. "Yes, but if you have any pain in your hands I want you back up here, no excuses. You've had too many injuries to your hands and I'm very much surprised you still have full mobility with them."

Harry suppressed his desire to roll his eyes and nodded as he pushed himself off the bed. "I will," he said simply and then practically sprinted out of the Hospital Wing. Madame Pomfrey shook her head in exasperation as she watched him go.

Harry sat down next to Hermione at the Gryffindor table. He only had a few minutes until his Ancient Runes class with Hermione but he was starving. He nearly whimpered as he tried to put together a quick sandwich with his heavily bandaged hands.

“Oh, Harry, let me do that,” Hermione said with guilt in her voice as she put together his sandwich for him. “I’m so sorry, how on earth are you going to write our Runes exam today?”

Harry looked at Hermione with confusion in his eyes. “We have an exam today? Bugger, I guess it’s a good thing I can’t write. I forgot to study,” Harry mumbled as Hermione glared at him.

“Harry, you’ve known about this exam for over a week, how could you forget to study?” Hermione looked aghast. It wasn’t like Harry to forget something like that.

Harry shook his head with a sigh. “I’m sorry, Hermione, I honestly forgot about the exam.”

Hermione looked at her friend with concern in her eyes and then shared a glance with Ron. Ron looked at Harry as well. Harry, having noticed the shared gaze, looked back and forth between his two friends. “What?” he asked.

“Harry, this isn’t the first time you’ve forgotten about something this obvious in the last few months,” Ron said hesitantly.

“What are you saying, Ron, that my brains addled! Well, forgive me for having a bit more stress on my shoulders than the average bloke. Maybe things like this aren’t important enough for me to care about remembering anymore!” Harry shouted and got up and left the Great Hall and his two shocked friends behind. Several people, including staff, stared at him as he stormed out.

Once outside the Great Hall, Harry collapsed against the wall and then slid down it with his head in his hands. He hadn’t meant to get angry with his friends, but he’d been trying to ignore the fact that he’d been having random memory loss since Christmas. He knew it was from the amount of times he’d been held under the Cruciatus Curse. He also knew that anyone normal would have been driven to insanity a long time ago.

Harry pushed himself up when he heard the first of the students leaving the Great Hall. He waited outside for his friends and as soon

as he saw the two he pulled them aside and into an empty classroom. "I'm sorry," he said quietly.

"It's alright, Harry, but why did you get angry?" asked Hermione.

"Because Ron's right, I have been having memory loss; since Christmas in fact. I think it's from the Cruciatus Curse," Harry said heavily.

"Have you told Madame Pomfrey?" Hermione asked. "Maybe she could help you."

Harry shook his head. "I don't think so, Hermione. I don't think it's getting any worse anyways. But if the two of you want to remind me about the little things every once in a while, I'd appreciate it," Harry said seriously.

Hermione hugged Harry. "You've been through so much, why this too?" she whispered as Ron looked at Harry with sympathy in his eyes.

--

A few days later, Harry walked into Severus' office and told him about his memory loss problems. The only reason he was telling him was because Hermione had insisted. Severus gave him a potion he'd developed specifically for the after affects of the Cruciatus Curse and apologized that he'd not given it to Harry sooner. He also had Harry start on practicing a more advanced form of Occlumency that should help with keeping his memories intact. It was more controlled then what Harry had mastered and Harry found it extremely difficult.

Harry sat on Severus' couch in his quarters after several hours of practicing the new form of Occlumency. He was exhausted but his mind felt more organized and he was thinking more clearly. Severus handed Harry a cup of tea and sat down in an armchair across from him.

"How have you been doing, Harry, besides the memory loss and such?" he asked.

Harry shrugged. "To be honest, I'm tired. I feel like this war with the Dark Lord is never going to end."

"It will one day," Severus said reassuringly.

"Yes, it will, but the question still remains, will I be alive when it's over? I'm scared, not of Voldemort or his Death Eaters, but of the feeling around my heart that screams that my time here is limited. Every time I go against him, I feel more and more close to death," Harry whispered shakily. He took a deep breath in. "I fear that I'm going to have to use the dark current of magic to defeat him. And I know I will win if I do that."

"Harry..."

Harry looked Severus directly in the eyes. "Severus, I'm not strong enough to fight against that much magic. It will consume me, it will twist me and I will become worse than Voldemort could ever possibly be. When that happens I want you to kill me."

Severus slammed his cup down on the coffee table and stood up with horror in his eyes. "You cannot ask me to do that. I cannot do that!" he shouted.

Harry looked up at the man he truly loved as a father. "Please," he pleaded, tears coming to his eyes. "Please, I want a chance to be with my parents again and I will not get that if I become worse than Voldemort."

Severus stared at Harry, fighting back his own emotions and then sat down beside the boy. "I will do as you ask," he whispered after a moment. "I will, but I pray to God I never have to."

--

Harry, Ron, Neville, and Hermione ran into Defense Against the Dark Arts a week later. The four of them were panting and twelve minutes late. Really it wasn't their fault, not that they'd be able to prove that

without incriminating themselves. Well, maybe Harry was a little bit responsible.

Remus looked up in annoyance at the four. "Forty points from Gryffindor; take a seat," he said and turned back to the class. "As I was saying, Professor Dumbledore has decided that you are all old enough to learn about dark curses banned by the Ministry of Magic."

Hermione raised her hand and Remus rolled his eyes but then nodded. "Yes, Miss Granger?"

"I'm sorry, Professor, but are those curses going to include the Unforgivable Curses, Sir?" she asked timidly.

Harry, who had been whispering to Ron about excuses of why they were late, looked up at Hermione's words. Neville, sitting beside Hermione also looked up to Remus at the front of the class.

Remus nodded. "Yes, Miss Granger, in fact we will be learning about those first, and as you had the foresight to ask about them you can name one for us to begin with."

Hermione opened her mouth and then closed it as she looked behind her at Harry. Harry knew which one she had on the tip of her tongue. "Umm, the – the Killing Curse," she said quietly, looking back up to Remus.

"Yes, the most deadly of all dark arts curses," stated Remus as he looked at Harry briefly himself. "There is nothing known that can block the Killing Curse –"

Harry's hand immediately shot up, even though he hadn't intended to get himself involved with this lesson at all. "There is a way to block the Killing Curse," Harry interrupted.

"We don't know how you were able to turn the curse away as a –" Remus began again but Harry interrupted yet again.

"No, Professor, that's not what I meant. There is another way; just many don't consider it in the face of it being cast at them."

“And what way is that?” asked Remus with interest.

“Another object,” Harry said simply and Remus and everyone else looked confused. “A spell doesn’t always need to be blocked by something magical. A solid object can act as a shield against the Killing Curse.”

Remus smiled. “Very good, Harry, but I was referring to another spell, such as the shielding charm.”

Harry smiled sheepishly. “Sorry.”

“No, you are absolutely correct, any spell, including the Killing Curse can be blocked by a physical object, but by magical means there is no counter curse and there is no way of blocking it. Luckily most Witches and Wizards lack the will to be able to cast the curse to its full potential. One must want to kill for this curse to be affective. Many of you could cast the curse on me repeatedly and I doubt I’d get much more than a nosebleed, maybe a headache as well,” Remus said with a chuckle to lighten the atmosphere.

Seamus raised his hand and Remus nodded. “Professor, are we going to get to see these curses cast?” he asked and Hermione glared at him appallingly.

“Yes, Mister Finnigan, but not by him,” said a voice from the back of the classroom. Everyone turned to see Snape standing in the doorway. “Forgive my tardiness, Professor Lupin, I was dealing with a swamp in my dungeons. I cannot fathom how it got there,” he said dryly as he looked at Harry, Ron, Neville, and Hermione.

Harry simply looked back at Severus with a raised eyebrow; unfortunately his compatriots weren’t so cool about. Ron shrunk down in his desk, Neville whimpered slightly, and Hermione put her head in her hands. Harry rolled his eyes and shrugged. Severus only shook his head and moved to the front of the classroom.

“I haven’t had any training with casting the Unforgivable Curses,” Remus said. “Professor Snape, however, as a Defense Against the

Dark Arts Master, has. He will be demonstrating them for us today. Do not worry; it will only be on insects."

"Which of the Unforgivable Curses did you decide to start with," Severus asked Remus.

"The class chose the Killing Curse."

"Indeed, then that will be the first one I demonstrate."

Harry frowned and looked away as Severus, with a quiet Avada Kedavra, cast the Killing Curse on a large spider. The green light lingered slightly and Harry clenched his hands to keep them from shaking as the memory of his friends dying from that curse sprung across his mind as if it had happened yesterday. Harry was beginning to wish that Severus had told him about today's lesson; he would have found a way to miss it.

Ron nudged his shoulder and Harry looked up. They'd moved onto the Cruciatus Curse, but he'd blocked out Remus' voice, explaining it. "Hey, you alright, Mate?" Ron asked quietly.

Harry nodded. "Yeah, I'm fine." Harry noted Neville's reaction was much like his own, when it came to the very brief demonstration of the Cruciatus Curse and Severus must have noticed it as well as he didn't hold the curse for very long at all; a couple seconds maybe.

"The last of three Unforgivable Curses is the Imperious Curse," Remus stated.

'The Imperious Curse mayhap, would that be more to your liking?' Harry abruptly stood up as Voldemort's voice echoed in his ears. Everyone looked at him as he looked around himself shakily for the source before he realized that it was only in his head.

"Harry, are you alright?" Remus asked.

"Excuse me," Harry whispered and then nearly ran from the room. Severus followed after him quickly.



"Class dismissed," Remus said and followed after the two, leaving the students to all stare after the three.

Harry ran nearly a floor away before he stopped, breathing heavily and moved into an empty classroom to collect his thoughts. He leaned against one of the desks, trying to clear his mind of his memories. He didn't look up when Severus entered the classroom and put a hand on his shoulder.

"I told you not to go to class today if you didn't think you could handle it," Severus said heavily.

Harry looked up and turned to Severus. "I don't remember you telling me," he said with a heavy sigh.

"It's alright; I should have mentioned it this morning. It was the Imperious Curse wasn't it?" asked Severus gently.

"I heard him, in my head. I'm sure it was just a memory, but it was his voice. Mocking as always," Harry said bitterly.

"This was from before?"

Harry nodded. "The last time we met before I died. He asked me if I was able to use the Killing Curse yet. I didn't answer him. I had no answer. 'How about the Cruciatus Curse, Potter? The Imperious Curse mayhap, would that be more to your liking?'" Harry spit out and then slammed his fist down onto the desk. "He always knows how to hurt me the most. He knew that would get a reaction out of me. And of course he had to bring up Ginny." Harry leaned on the desk with his head down as tears came to his eyes. "God, Severus, I can still hear her screams as she plead for me to fight against them."

Severus pulled Harry into his arms. "It wasn't your fault. You weren't fighting against one person, you were unarmed and alone. Any man would have succumb to the Dark Lords Imperious Curse and you were able to fight against six."

Harry pushed away from Snape angrily. "Was I? Because the way I remember it I let him win! He was too much for me, and I killed Ginny!"

"Potter, shut up!" Harry snapped his mouth shut as Severus shouted at him. Severus breathed in deeply and then let it out. "You didn't kill her, as much as you want to blame yourself for it, the Dark Lord killed her and you have got to stop blaming yourself, for everything!"

"I don't –" argued Harry.

"Yes, you do, and now I understand why."

Harry and Severus turned abruptly to be facing Remus Lupin with his wand pointed at the both of them. Harry took a step back as Remus walked fully into the classroom and closed the door behind him.

"How long have you been standing there?" Severus asked.

"Long enough," Remus said seriously.

"I can explain," Harry said desperately, taking a step forward. "Please just let me explain."

Remus didn't lower his wand and stared hard at Harry. "Why should I?"

"Because I'm from the future and I'm the only one who can kill Voldemort," Harry said seriously, staring right back.

Remus' eyes narrowed. "Where's our Harry?"

Harry swallowed thickly. "Dead, I think."

"Dead?" whispered Remus in shock as his hand lowered and Severus quickly took the opportunity to take the man's wand from his grasp. Remus looked startled back at Snape, who now had both his wand and Remus' trained on the Werewolf.

"I'm sorry," Harry said taking his own wand out. "Will you let me explain? Or am I going to have to Oblivate you?"

"I don't think you're giving me much of a choice," Remus said and then sat down at the nearest desk, facing Harry.

Harry lowered his wand and started to explain, everything.

--

A/N: Sorry it took me so long with this.

## Chapter Thirty-One – The Third Task and Decisions

Remus stared at Harry and then at Severus and then at Harry again. Harry was holding his breath, waiting for the Werewolf's reaction. "So Harry is really dead?" Remus asked quietly.

Harry hesitated but then nodded, their Harry was dead. "When I arrived in the past as a ghost, he wasn't moving and I'm fairly certain he wasn't breathing. I think my soul took the place of my younger self and though I'm not quite sure how, I think I absorbed the remains of the Philosopher's stone. I have three shards in my right hand." Harry said as he held up his hand, letting the light catch on the stones. "I am Harry Potter, I have the same past as my younger self; I only have a future that I wouldn't even wish on Voldemort."

Remus had looked down in thought as Harry explained. He looked back up and directly into Harry's eyes and then his eyes widened as everything Harry had told him over the last hour really sunk in. "Voldemort is the Voldemort from your past. He followed you here."

"Yes, he knows everything I know and we are connected through my scar." Harry bit his lip and looked at Severus briefly and then he looked back at Remus. "There's something more. I'm the Protector of Hogwarts."

Remus stared at Harry in shock. "The Protector, but all of them..."

"Went dark," said Harry bluntly. "I know and I know why. I've made Severus promise me that if I ever go dark to kill me."

Severus frowned and nodded as Remus turned to look at him. "You think there's a chance of that?" Remus questioned.

Harry looked away from both adults for a moment before he looked back up and directly at Remus. "Yes a very high chance of that."

"Harry won't go dark," Severus said determinedly and Harry just shook his head, not even bothering to counter Severus' false belief.

"We should tell Dumbledore," Remus stated, rising from his seat.

Harry raised his wand and stood. "No."

"However, we obviously are not going to, but how long do you think you can lie to the Headmaster," Remus finished as Harry lowered his wand.

"I don't know, but I think I've been doing a good job so far, he doesn't even know I unblocked my magic." Remus' eyebrows shot up at that and Harry chuckled. "Not doing that again. I thought the first time around was painful..." Harry shivered a bit at the memory.

"When did you find out about this?" Remus asked Snape.

"The summer of his second year," Severus answered. "I found him in Diagon Alley buying Potions ingredients and realized what he was trying to do. I have to admit, I took advantage of him," Severus said heavily.

"Actually, I took advantage of you. We both know that I probably wouldn't have been able to manage that potion on my own. Not to mention I got you to swear never to go back to Voldemort even before you knew about my past. I think I manipulated that situation pretty well," Harry said smugly. "I probably would have gotten away with it too, if I hadn't woken up with..."

"That was shocking. I don't know which disturbed me more; the Dark Mark or the Death Mark."

"Wait a minute, you are leaving things out. The Death Mark, I thought you got that here," Remus suddenly said, "and the Dark Mark?"

Harry looked away from Remus; he'd try to keep some things from him. Like his torture and what he'd done to Ginny. It was one thing revealing this all to Snape when they hadn't even been friends, but Remus was closer to him then and now; like an Uncle, and he didn't want to see the horrified look on his face, he'd seen that already.

“Harry, you should tell him. You’ve told him pretty much everything else,” Severus said reasonably. “He already knows you died, I think he can handle knowing about the rest —”

Harry suddenly kicked aside a desk. “I don’t want him to know about the rest!” Harry growled angrily.

“Does this have something to do with Ginny?” Remus asked hesitantly.

Harry’s shoulders slumped in defeat. “I killed her,” Harry whispered.

Severus sighed. “Harry, you didn’t —”

“Stop saying that!” Harry shouted. “I killed her. It was my wand, my spell! I wasn’t strong enough to fight him! I’ve never been strong enough to fight him.” Harry dropped to the floor. “I couldn’t even stop the Death Eaters from killing Hermione and Ron. Why couldn’t he have killed me instead? If I’d died that day instead of them then Ginny...” Harry looked up to Remus, tears in his eyes. “I gave up. Ron and Hermione died and I couldn’t handle it.”

Remus sat back down. “What happened?” he asked gently.

Harry took in a deep breath and stood and started to pace. “Ron died first; I could never have stop it. Then Hermione was captured. I was fighting Voldemort and I froze when I saw Ron... Voldemort made me watch... I’ll never forget the acceptance in her eyes as she looked at me...” A tear slid down Harry’s cheek. “Voldemort took me captive, I didn’t even fight back. For two weeks he tortured me. He wanted to break me, but I was already broken. He used the Death Sphere on me and through pain made me beg him to put the Dark Mark on my arm. I’m amazed really that I was still alive and sane when the Order finally rescued me...”

“Harry,” Remus whispered. “You don’t have too...”

“I remember the look in your eyes as you unchained me. You thought I was dead. I remember struggling to make a sound, because I couldn’t move. When I did, you nearly dropped me,” Harry laughed

humorlessly. "It really didn't take me that long to recover, even without Madam Pomfrey. Ginny and I had come to Hogwarts, the school was closed, but we needed Basilisk Venom to destroy the last Horcrux. You and Tonks were going to meet us there. We went into the Chamber and got the Basilisk Venom, but when we came back out of the school, we were surrounded by Death Eaters. They thought it would be fun to see how long I could fight the Imperious Curse. Six I fought against at once, but then Voldemort... I wasn't strong enough and I killed her..."

Remus wrapped his arms around Harry. "We didn't get there in time," Remus surmised. "I'm so sorry cub."

--

The weeks passed rather quickly and uneventfully, but no one had forgotten how Harry had run out of Defense Against the Dark Arts class, especially Professor Dumbledore, who was keeping a close eye on him. The students were now learning how to fight the Imperious Curse and it didn't escape anyone's notice that Harry wasn't participating.

Harry sat and he watched, and every time class came around, they expected Remus to scold Harry, but he never did, instead he looked at Harry with sympathy, which Harry tried to ignore. But one good thing came out of Remus knowing about his past, when Harry wanted to sneak off to the Chamber, he had more alibis, and with Dumbledore watching more closely, he needed them.

"Harry," Hermione whispered beside Harry.

"Yeah," Harry whispered back.

"Who were you going to take the Yule Ball?"

Harry looked at the witch incredulously and then back up at Professor McGonagall, who was lecturing them on Transfiguration of Elements and how dangerous it could be. "You're asking me now? It's been months," he whispered.

"I thought you would have told us by now and you know how curious I am."

Harry chuckled quietly, amused she'd held out this long. "You know I really can't believe no one's ask me."

"Well you've been kind of spacey lately. I don't think people wanted to bother you after the whole Christmas thing, and then everyone was busy and distracted by the tournament." Harry rolled his eyes. "So who were you going to go with?"

"I was going to go with –"

"Miss Granger, Mr. Potter, is there something you would like to share with the class?" Professor McGonagall interrupted.

Hermione groaned. "He was just going to tell me, too," she said loudly and then clamped her mouth shut. "Sorry Professor."

"Nothing, Professor McGonagall, sorry," Harry said sheepishly, while Hermione buried her face in her hands to hide her embarrassment.

"Ten points from Gryffindor for your disruption," McGonagall said sternly and went back to her lecture as everyone kept glancing at Harry and Hermione; Ron snickering behind them.

As soon as class was dismissed Hermione turned to Harry for her answer but McGonagall interrupted again. Harry hid his amusement as he was asked to stay behind and Hermione glared at the professor as she was shooed out of the classroom.

"Mr. Potter, Professor Dumbledore would like to speak with you, he said for you to go directly to his office. The password is Saltwater Taffy," McGonagall said plainly.

"D-did he say why he wants to see me?" Harry asked.

McGonagall shook her head. "I've a vague idea, but I'll leave it up to him to tell you. You best get along." Harry nodded and started to



leave the classroom. "Mr. Potter." Harry turned around. "Do they know yet?"

"I haven't said a word, Professor," Harry said with a small mischievous smile.

McGonagall chuckled. "She is a persistent one."

"That she is, Professor," Harry laughed and left the classroom. Hermione was waiting outside for him with Ron. "I have to go to Dumbledore's office," Harry said.

"But –"

"I'll tell you later, Hermione," Harry said and walked off.

"You don't think he's in trouble for something, do you?" Harry heard Hermione say to Ron.

"Nah, I think he's avoiding the question," Ron said just before Harry turned the corner.

Harry hopped he wasn't in trouble. He couldn't think of anything he'd be in trouble for at any rate. It didn't take him long to get to Dumbledore's office. "Saltwater Taffy," he told the statue and the gargoyle moved aside. Harry didn't wait for the moving staircase and just walked up. He knocked lightly on the Headmaster's door.

"Come in, Harry," Dumbledore's voice came from within.

Harry looked up at the portrait, hiding high above the door on the opposite wall and waved. The man in the portrait waved back, chuckling lightly. Harry opened the door and entered. "You wished to see me, Sir?"

"Yes, please take a seat, lemon drop?" Dumbledore asked and Harry nodded and reached for one from the tin the headmaster held out. Dumbledore took one himself, Harry almost sighed; he wasn't in trouble.

Harry had learned over the years with the old man, what his mannerisms were in certain situations. When you were mildly in trouble, but nothing serious, he offered you a lemon drop, but didn't take one himself. Not to mention he has the stare in his eyes that clearly asks, 'Is there anything you wish to tell me before I tell you I know what you did.' Harry'd seen that stare many times and he was sure his dad and the Marauders knew it very well too.

Then of course there was the, 'You're in big trouble mister,' stare. Dumbledore didn't even offer lemon drops then. Not to mention the twinkle in his eye dims quite a bit. That's the stare that makes you fidget and feel as if your two feet tall.

Then there is the offer of tea. That means he's worried about you and wants to have a heart to heart talk. Harry hated those talks with Dumbledore, mainly because he usually was sent away feeling worse than when he arrived and had the subject in his mind for days afterwards.

But just lemon drops, it couldn't be that bad. Probably just wanted to know how he was doing in his extra studies. Harry waited patiently for Dumbledore to finish his calming draught-laced lemon drop. When he was finally finished he looked up at Harry.

"You're professors tell me that you are rather bored in their classes," Dumbledore said right off.

Harry blinked at the old man. "Bored?" They'd noticed that? "I wouldn't go so far as to say I'm bored, Sir. Unchallenged, quite possibly; except for maybe Arithmancy and Ancient Rune."

"You're bored," Dumbledore reiterated.

Harry shrugged but nodded. "I know the material so well, it's like I've been through it already," Harry stated, trying to keep the amusement out of his voice and off his face. "I'm quite ahead of everyone else, because of my studies with Severus and all." It mostly wasn't a lie.

"I understand Professor Lupin has been helping out with those now as well." Harry nodded. "That's good to hear, they have a lot to offer

you in the way of knowledge. Have you considered having Sirius help out as well, he is a magnificent dueler.”

“To be honest, Professor, I don’t believe either Sirius or Severus are ready to be working that closely together yet,” Harry said truthfully, “Maybe one day, but not yet.”

Dumbledore nodded. “Perhaps you’re right, my boy. Anyways, back to the issue at hand. I’ve spoken with your professors and they’ve agreed next term to move you up a year.” Harry looked with shock at Dumbledore, but Dumbledore held up his hand before Harry could speak. “The only way I can allow that without the Ministry interfering because of your age is if you pass your Ordinary Wizarding Level examinations this year.”

“This year?” asked Harry, a slight panic rising within him, “As in, a few weeks from now?”

“Yes, now I know you haven’t had all year to study, but Severus has assured me that you would pass them if you were to take them. And all of your Professors have agreed to go over the material with you extensively before the exams.”

“Wait a minute,” Harry said suddenly. “If I move up a year, I won’t be with my friends anymore.”

“You won’t be in their classes, yes, but you will keep your dorm until you graduate. I know you’ll be leaving them a year early, but you really are quite far ahead of them and it will only be to your benefit,” Dumbledore explained calmly.

Harry thought about it for a minute, before another thought occurred to him. “If I take my NEWT’s before I’m seventeen, do I have to wait a year to use magic outside of school?”

“Once you take your NEWT’s, the ministry will declare you a fully trained wizard and will allow you to do magic unrestricted. You can then decide whether you wish to get a career or stay as Severus’ apprentice and obtain your Masteries. If you decide to do that, I will

assign you quarters here at Hogwarts and you will help teach Severus' classes."

"Right," Harry whispered.

He chewed on his lip while he thought about it. He'd graduate a year early, but it wouldn't be with his friends. He had intended to finish school with them, but if he stayed as Severus' apprentice, he'd be here anyways; he'd still be able to see them. Harry looked up at Dumbledore; and when the timelines merged, he would have graduated Hogwarts already. He wouldn't have to be sneaking around to confront Voldemort, he'd have back up, he wouldn't be seen as a kid anymore; they'd take him seriously...

"I'll do it; I'll take my OWL's early."

"Excellent, I'll tell your professors and they'll set up a study schedule for you. If you have any problems let me know. I'll let you get back to your friends now," Dumbledore said jovially.

Harry smiled and got up from his seat. He was just by the door when Dumbledore call him back "Yes, Sir?" said Harry as he turned.

"I was just wondering, as most of the school is I'm sure, who you were going to take to the Yule Ball had you been well enough to go."

Harry chuckled. "Minerva McGonagall," Harry said as he walked out of the headmaster's office, leaving a laughing Albus Dumbledore in his wake.

--

The Third Task, Harry was more than anxious for it to start so he could get it over with. He didn't know if the cup at the center would be a Portkey to Voldemort, but he was determined to get there first. If it was a Portkey, then at least none of them would die. It was agreed by the Champions, because they'd all helped each other out of the lake, that they'd all deserved first place. It took some persuasion, but the judges finally agreed.

Harry fingered the pendant that Remus and Severus had forced him to wear. It was a personal Portkey back to the school, just in case, but of course it would only work for one person. It had taken Remus and Severus quite a few weeks to convince Dumbledore to allow one for Harry; especially as they couldn't tell the Headmaster why. Dumbledore believed that Harry would be protected on Hogwarts grounds. That was true, of course, now more than ever it was true, but off school property he was on his own.

Harry looked at the gathering crowds. Ron and Hermione waved at him excitedly, standing next to Mrs. Weasley, who smiled at Harry and Harry waved half heartedly back. He hadn't told them yet about his moving up in class standing. They'd been bugging him, especially Hermione, about where he'd been every night for the last few weeks and why he hadn't been in classes with them the last couple weeks. Hermione had been fretting about it more than Ron, but Harry had placated them by sitting in on classes after taking the OWL's, which were just as tiring as he remembered, but it felt good to have them done with.

Severus had his shoulders in a vise grip, probably just about as nervous for Harry as Harry was for himself. Harry could see Remus pacing in front of Sirius, who was watching his friend go back and forth like a cat would watch a mouse, with amusement in his eyes, completely oblivious to Remus' distress. "Don't worry Harry, you said it yourself, several times, the Dark Lord would be a fool to try the same thing twice," Severus said reassuringly.

"I thought he was a fool," Harry chuckled nervously. "I'll be fine; it's the others I'm worried about."

"Professor Dumbledore placed the cup himself, so there's nothing to worry about."

Harry nodded and then straightened as Bagman's voice suddenly sounded through the stadium. "Ladies and Gentleman, the third and final task of the Triwizard Tournament is about to begin. As you all know because the champions themselves decided on a draw for the second task, Mr. Harry Potter is in first place, followed close behind by Mr. Viktor Krum and tied for third place Mr. Cedric Diggory and

Miss. Fleur Delacour. Mr. Potter will enter the maze first, followed by the other champions. Good luck to you all."

"Good luck, Harry," Severus said, leaving Harry to the task before him. Harry looked at the other champions and then up to the towering maze.

The whistle blew and Harry took in a deep breath and entered into the darkness. "Lumos," Harry whispered and his wand lit up. Harry looked ahead of him and then started jogging.

It wasn't long before Harry heard the faint whistle that alerted Harry that Viktor had come into the maze, shortly after that, Bagman's whistle sounded for the third time. Harry slowed up a bit when he realized that he had yet to meet anything. Not even a jinx. He proceeded more cautiously, though he wanted to run, to get to the center before the others. Harry was suddenly tripped up, but when he looked down after pushing himself to his feet, there was nothing there.

Harry shook himself and muttered a point me spell again. He didn't get very far before he saw something walking towards him from the darkness. "Stigmatis de Tempusoris." Harry froze at those whispered words. He knew it was just the Boggart, but he couldn't move as the image of Voldemort appeared completely, holding the glowing sphere. "Stigmatis de Mortis."

Harry sunk to his knees as memories assaulted him and he clamped his hands over his ears so he wouldn't hear anymore and then suddenly it all stopped as someone shouted, "Riddikulus!"

"Arry, are you all right?" Fleur asked and Harry looked up shakily to see her and Cedric standing over him.

Harry nodded. "Yeah, yeah I'm fine. Thank you."

Cedric nodded and then pulled Harry to his feet. "I'd heard that your Boggart was..."

"Voldemort, yeah," Harry said, looking away and tightening his fists to stop them from shaking, it didn't help.

"Are you going to be all right?" Cedric suddenly asked and Harry looked up at his concerned eyes.

Harry shook his head. "No, but let's finish this."

"Together," Krum suddenly said. "Let's finish this together."

Cedric and Fleur nodded and Harry looked around at the three. They were set to finish this with him, and there wasn't anything he could say against it, he wanted them all to win as well. Harry nodded and they all set off, using the point me spell.

Harry was glad they'd stuck together as they met up with two more Boggarts, and a small group of Hagrid's Blast-Ended Skrewts, which they all fought side by side and were laughing at the end of, as three of them were now wearing pink frilly dresses, thanks to Fleur. They were still laughing pretty hard when they came across the Sphinx. Harry listened to the full riddle and then shouted out, "Spider," before any of the others could think about it.

They ran on and soon the cup was in front of them, gleaming in the darkness. Harry looked at the others in indecision. Should he sprint to the cup and take it before any of them had the chance or should he chance that it wasn't a Portkey to Voldemort and allow all of them to win the stupid tournament. Harry closed his eyes and looked away from the cup. If it wasn't a Portkey, they'd hate him. They'd decided to do this together.

Kill the Spare.

Harry's head snapped up. "No!" Harry growled and shoved passed Cedric and ran for the cup.

Before he could even process what he was seeing, an Acromantula came over the hedge at him. "Harry, look out!" Cedric shouted, but Harry didn't even have time to dodge as the giant Spider was on him.

Harry cried out as its huge pincers sunk into his leg and he was dragged upwards. Harry pointed his wand at it. "Expelliarmus!" he

cried and the spider let him drop. Harry landed on his injured leg and he bit back a scream. "Stupefy," Harry yelled, but the spell was weak.

"STUPEFY!" three more yells sounded as the spider made for Harry again. It crumpled, upside down, feet from Harry.

Harry looked up at the three, who came to stand over him. Harry expected to see anger in their eyes, but they were smiling. Krum hauled him up and supported him. "I think Herm-own-ninny is correct, you have a saving people thing," Krum said in amusement.

"Ow did you know about ze Spider?" Fleur asked.

Harry just shook his head in disbelief. "I don't know."

Cedric chuckled and ruffled Harry's hair. "Come on, let's get the cup and get out of here. You're leg looks pretty bad."

A few seconds later and the four of them were standing around the cup; Harry was still being supported by Krum. Harry wanted to take it first, but they'd just saved him, again. As the four of them all reached out their hands, Harry prayed that it wasn't a Portkey to Voldemort.

"One – Two – Three," Cedric said and the they all touched the cup and then there was a jerk behind their navels and Harry closed his eyes against the swirling colors as they whizzed by...

As soon as his feet touched solid ground, Harry raised his wand, but then he sunk to the ground as soon as his eyes opened. They were at Hogwarts, at the beginning of the maze and everyone was cheering. Harry started to laugh as he looked up at the others who were laughing as well as the stadium filled with even more applause as it was announced that they'd tied for first place.

The other three champions wandered off as they were greeted by their family and friends. Harry just sat on the grass of the stadium and watched them, relieved and happy. Harry looked down as his leg gave a twinge of pain and then up again when he heard people coming towards him. Harry smiled crookedly as Severus, Sirius, Remus, Hermione, Ron and Mrs. Weasley came towards him.



Harry's smile suddenly dropped when their faces morphed from happy ones to horrified ones. Harry barely had time to turn and lift his hand before an all too familiar green light splashed against his palm and engulfed him.

--

A/N: I'm sorry it took me so long to get this out, but life kind of got in the way for a bit. I hope to have the next chapter up a bit sooner this time, but we'll see as I'll soon be in the process of moving and that's a bit time consuming.

## Chapter Thirty-Two – Mostly Dead

Harry walked around himself, yes himself. Had he not already once been through this experience, he'd be panicking. He should be panicking. Everyone else around him was panicking, that was for sure. He didn't know how long it had been before he appeared as a ghost, an apparently unseen ghost. Long enough for Barty Crouch Jr. to be apprehended with enough stunners to throw the man back several feet and nearly kill him. Harry didn't know if the others knew the Death Eater was on the brink of death, but he didn't think any of them was caring at the moment either.

Harry looked away from Barty Crouch and at the crowd. Most everyone was in shock. A hushed silence had descended over the entire stadium; the only sounds came from the group of people huddled around his body. They were crying and holding each other. Severus was clutching at his body, and it was obvious, refused to let him go.

Harry felt an array of emotions; sadness, regret, guilt, anger. He didn't know which he should be feeling more. He was dead, again. Annoyance, he was above all annoyed. He hadn't even been killed by Voldemort!

But there was nothing he could do about it. Harry took one last look at his body and then wandered off. Should he become visible anytime soon, he didn't think any of them could handle seeing him there. Harry didn't know where to go; he didn't know how far he could go. He looked up at the castle and surprising himself, let the wind take him there.

When he arrived at the Hall, going through the massive double doors, he was surprised to be greeted by every ghost in Hogwarts. "Umm, hi," Harry said uncertainly.

"Hello, Mr. Potter," Sir Nicholas said solemnly.

"Why am I a ghost?" Harry asked.

“Unfinished business, Harry,” Myrtle replied. “We all have unfinished business to some extent.”

Harry nodded. “What will happen now?”

“Likely your funeral, I would suggest not going to it, dear,” the Gray Lady said. “It can be hard to see them mourning for you.”

Harry nodded, wondering what his funeral would be like. Would it be for him, or the Boy-Who-Lived, now Killed? Harry looked up at the other ghosts. “I’m just going to float around for a while. Do you know when I’ll start to be seen?”

“Any time, dear. Myrtle was seen a couple of days after her death, however the Barron wasn’t seen for nearly a hundred years,” the Gray Lady said.

Harry nodded, “All right.”

With that, Harry floated off. He didn’t know where he was going; only that he wanted to go anywhere but there, he didn’t feel like he belonged with the ghosts of Hogwarts. He thought about going down to visit Mort, but then figured the serpent couldn’t see him yet.

He floated around outside of the castle. It was amazing the freedom he had as a ghost, but he wished he could be with his family. Harry didn’t know how long he wandered for, but as the sky started to lighten and the stars disappeared from view, Harry returned to the confines of the castle.

Harry, for some unknown reason was pulled to a far corner of the castle. He understood why when he floated through the wall and saw Barty Crouch Jr. sitting and staring at the bars in front of him that was obviously the only door out.

“Happy now that you killed me?” Harry asked, not expecting an answer so was understandably startled when Crouch looked up at him and backed away.

“What do you want?” he asked shakily.

"To be with my parents, to be alive," Harry answered honestly. "Thanks by the way, now I've got neither, stupid unfinished business."

"I hope you don't expect me to apologize," Crouch sneered.

"No, I don't expect that," Harry said bluntly. "Do you know what they're going to do with you?" Harry asked. Crouch shook his head. "I'd wager the Dementor's Kiss. Have you ever seen someone get the Dementor's Kiss before?" Harry looked Crouch up and down, taking in his fear. "Oh good, at least you'll know what's coming to you."

"Why are you here?" Crouch asked angrily, still keeping his distance as much as possible.

"I don't know, was pulled here. Maybe the school wants me to give you an ultimatum."

"W-what do you mean?"

"I mean, Hogwarts kills you, you go to hell, if there's such a place, hopefully suffer for all eternity, or you take what the ministry dishes out to you. I hear Dementors destroy the soul, painfully and over a long period of time, you're choices don't look too good, mate," Harry laughed humorlessly.

"Get out!" Crouch shouted. "Leave me alone!"

Harry laughed and looked out through the bars. "Maybe Dumbledore will be lenient on you, make a deal with you; give you a second chance..." Harry saw the Dementors approaching with Dumbledore, the minister, and a few Aurors. "Then again, maybe not," Harry said.

"I said get out!"

Harry floated so he was right in front of Crouch. "At least I'm giving you a choice; it's more than you gave me!"

"Leave me the fuck alone, Potter!" Crouch shouted, moving into the far wall of his cell.

Harry raised an eyebrow. "Very well," he said and flew through Crouch and out the back wall.

He waited for a few minutes, watching the Dementors get closer before he floated away, not wanting to see Crouch get the kiss. He hated the man, but the Dementors kiss was a gruesome sight that he didn't want to see again.

Harry wandered up to Gryffindor tower, after that, passing through the closed portrait. Sir Nicholas was there and Harry noticed that most of Gryffindor was still up. His friends were still up. "How they doing?" he asked quietly as he glided over to Sir Nick. He was obviously unseen again as no one but Nick took notice.

Nicholas look up at him with a sad expression on his face. "Not good. They're taking it very hard. Professor McGonagall just left; I don't think she knows how to console them as she's still trying to console herself," Nick said sadly. "What are you doing here? You don't want to see this."

Harry shrugged. "I don't know. I miss them."

"They miss you as well," Nick said before he floated off through the wall.

Harry went closer to where his friends were huddled. He was surprised to see Mrs. Weasley and Bill still there. Mrs. Weasley was comforting Ron while Bill held his sister tightly. Hermione was squeezed in between Fred and George. She looked like she was in shock; she was shaking and rocking herself back and forth as the twins held her, trying to give her comfort that they themselves needed.

The rest of the fourth year Gryffindors were off to one side, huddled in a small group. Harry stood behind Neville as they talked quietly among themselves. He was busy looking at Hermione, wishing he could be there for her, so missed the beginning of the argument.

"Don't you dare say that!" Neville shouted. "You're not even worth half of what Harry Potter's worth!"

"I didn't mean it like that, Neville," Seamus said hoarsely, looking up to the boy who was now standing. "I just meant that he's been through so much, at least now he can be with his parents."

Neville sat down and put his head in his hands. "I hope he is," he whispered.

"I wish I was," Harry said bitterly, but his words went unheard.

Harry left Gryffindor Tower then; glided right out through the wall and into the early morning. Something caught his attention out of the corner of his eye. There was a single light on in one of the towers and as Harry had always been curious. He floated there, but remained out of sight just in case he became seen again.

It was Dumbledore's office. Remus, Sirius and Severus were there, but the headmaster was absent, dealing with Crouch. The three looked awful as Harry surveyed them, not taking in what they were discussing until Sirius got up and literally threw his armchair.

"Why didn't he say anything, I'm his godfather!" Sirius shouted at Remus and Severus.

"It was hard enough for him to tell me," Remus said solemnly, looking at his hands. "He was tortured, Padfoot, lost his friends, had to kill..." Remus choked on his own words and put his head in his hands.

Sirius righted his chair and sat back down with a heavy sigh. "I don't understand. He's been forced to go through so much and now he's..." Sirius closed his eyes, unable to go on. "I don't understand," he repeated after a few moments of silence.

"I failed him. I swore to Lily I'd protect him and I failed him," Severus whispered heavily.

"None of us could have foreseen, Severus. It was not something we could have prevented. We all thought Harry was safe on Hogwarts grounds, Harry thought he was safe on Hogwarts grounds..." Remus trailed off.

"I was going to adopt him this summer," Severus whispered. "But now... I hope he's with Lily and James..." Severus choked back a sob.

Harry looked down at the floor. He was going to adopt him. He would have had a father again. He would have had family. Harry felt like crying himself, but he didn't think he could.

"Where's Albus?" Sirius asked quietly a few minutes later.

"With the Minister, haggling over Crouch's fate, not that they should be!" growled Severus. "We all saw him do it. Why Dumbledore insisted on saving his life..."

"I agree, Severus, but it's out of our hands," Remus said consolingly.

Harry couldn't take watching this anymore and left the office. He understood why the Gray Lady said not to attend his funeral, it was too much to handle. The sun was fully peeking over the mountains, illuminating the entire castle when Harry wandered into the Hospital Wing. He didn't know why he was there. Maybe to see his body one last time, he didn't know.

There was a curtain around where they'd laid out his body. To be honest, had he not been a ghost he would have thought himself sleeping. He looked peaceful. Harry stared at himself for a long time. He could hear the beginnings of the castle coming to life in the distance, but he ignored it.

This wasn't right. He shouldn't be dead. He hadn't defeated Voldemort yet, who was going to defeat him now? What was going to happen to his friends, to everyone? "This is so stupid!" Harry shouted as anger overrode all other emotions. "I should be alive! What's the point of giving me a second chance if I can't even do what I was sent here for?" Harry raged at nothing and everything. Harry ran a hand through his ghostly hair and looked at his body.

"This is all your fault! You're so bloody weak! I hate you!" Harry shouted and slammed his fists down on himself. His ghostly hands

suddenly passed though his hands clasped together over his chest, through the shards of the Philosopher's Stone, and through his heart.

A great pain shot through his body and a scream tore out of his lungs and then he sat straight up, gasping for air and clenching at his chest and his painfully pounding heart. "Ouch," Harry whispered once he'd gotten his breathing under control and then he realized he was breathing. "I'm alive! Holy shit!" he shouted and then rubbed his chest again. "Ouch." Apparently his heart didn't like starting so suddenly.

It didn't take long at all before Madam Pomfrey, wide eyed and with wand drawn, came through the curtain. She took one look at Harry sitting up in bed, screamed and then fainted.

Harry stared at the unconscious Medi-Witch. "Oops," he laughed. "Ouch," he winced and rubbed his sore chest again. Harry decided then to get up. He swung his legs over the side of the bed and made to jump out of bed, but his legs nearly collapsed underneath him. He grabbed onto the bed and pulled himself back up.

He looked down, his leg was healed; he didn't know how that happened. He felt really weak. Harry wasn't surprised by this; he had been dead just a few minutes ago. Finally he got his legs steady underneath him and gingerly walked towards Madam Pomfrey. He shook her, but she didn't wake up. He looked around for a moment at the deserted ward and then using her wand, levitated her to the nearest bed. He left her wand with her as he, still unsteady on his feet, left the Hospital Wing.

Harry didn't know where he was going. The halls were deserted. He didn't think he could climb any stairs, right now. He figured he could probably go down them though. The Great Hall was his best bet; he knew people would be there. So supporting himself, using the wall and banisters for support, he finally reached the Great Hall.

It was silent, eerily silent. But there were people there. The entire school in fact. This was going to be one hell of an entrance. Harry tried to straighten himself, but he just didn't have the energy, so holding himself up on the doorframe he passed over the threshold. Everyone was looking at Dumbledore, so Dumbledore was the only



person to see him. The old man went pale and would have fallen from his standing position had Severus not caught him.

“Albus, are you alright?” McGonagall asked worriedly.

“Harry,” Dumbledore whispered staring towards him.

Severus’ head shot up to see him. “Oh My God!” he exclaimed and every head turned towards him.

Harry’s shaking legs decided to stop supporting him then and he collapsed onto the floor, still holding onto the wall. “Ouch,” he hissed, as his heart beat harder, as if to remind him he had just been dead, and to take it easy.

It took a half a second but then the hall was in pure chaos. Harry just sat there, leaning against the stone doorframe, watching everything with detachment until the staff finally got over their shock and made their way towards him. Harry looked up at Dumbledore.

“Madam Pomfrey is unconscious in the Hospital Wing, I think she was rather shocked when I – I woke up,” Harry said quietly and then Severus’ arms were around him. “Ouch! Bugger in hell, take it easy, Severus, I was just dead!” Harry hissed as he was jostled. Severus released him.

“I’m sorry, you’re alive,” Severus stated, gripping his shoulders, clearly still in shock.

“Noticed,” Harry said tiredly. “I was hit with the Killing curse again, wasn’t I?” Harry looked around when no one answered. They were all still in shock. Sirius was on the floor, just staring at him. Remus looked like he was going to have a nervous breakdown. Dumbledore was sheet white. The rest of the hall, didn’t look much better than Dumbledore. He hoped no one had a heart attack. “I’ll take that as a yes,” Harry whispered.

--

A/N: Okay I felt a bit bad with leaving it at such a dramatic cliffy, so here you go. I'll try and get the next one out as soon as possible.

## Chapter Thirty-Three – Peace and Quiet

It had taken almost a week for Harry to get his strength back. He really had shocked the school, seeing as he had walked in on a moment of silence in his honor. But he thought he had shocked himself more. He had come back from the dead after all, after being hit by the Killing Curse, again. No one had a heart attack, thankfully, but many people had fainted, including McGonagall and Hermione.

Harry played ignorant about how he thought he'd been able to come back, well with all but Severus, Remus, and Sirius. He assumed it was the shards of the Philosopher's Stone again. It was the only thing he could come up with because he had well and thoroughly been dead. He was glad he wasn't anymore; he didn't much like death, especially as he kept coming back as a ghost. Harry didn't reveal to the three men that he'd been a ghost; he didn't want them to know about him listening in on their conversation.

Harry didn't have to pretend to be a little nervous when Remus and Severus told him that they'd told Sirius. He'd seen the man's reaction in Dumbledore's office after all. It was obvious Sirius didn't know how to act around him after finding out about his past. Especially when he asked where he was through all of it and Harry reluctantly revealed that he had died at the end of his fifth year. For Harry's part, he felt much better now that Sirius knew, now that Sirius understood.

It had been decided, probably because they all wanted to keep an eye on him, that he wouldn't need to go back to the Dursley's this year. Harry was frankly grateful for that; not because he didn't want to visit with his relatives, now that he got along with them, but because he wanted to spend the summer with his friends.

It was now two weeks into the summer holiday. Hermione, Ron, and pretty much the entire Weasley clan was at Grimmauld Place with Harry, Sirius and Remus. The Weasley's were staying for two reasons. The first was because there had been Death Eater sightings around the Burrow, though no attack had been made, they wanted to air on the side of caution. The second, and why Hermione was staying with them, was because of Harry, though no one mentioned it, they were all still really shaken up about his death and resurrection,

more so about his death. So the house was jam packed, practically overflowing. And with Order meetings, sometimes up to three times a week, with people staying over, Harry really, really wanted some alone time.

But that was the problem. He couldn't go into a room without someone already being there, with the exception of maybe the bathroom, and even then, he usually had to wait. He would politely ask them to leave, maybe find another room, but then he usually had someone following him. He understood that it was a shock to everyone when he died, but he was back now and he was only human and could only take so much of the constant attention.

Which was why Harry Potter was storming tonight's Order of the Phoenix meeting. Hermione was right behind him, attempting to talk him out of disrupting it, as he descended the stairs. Ron, Ginny, Fred and George, were all leaning against the door with an extendable ear, trying to hear what was going on inside. They all jumped away as Harry barreled through them and with a small flick of his wrist, that he didn't even notice he'd done, slammed open the door.

"I'm sorry to interrupt, really I am," was Harry's first words as everyone suddenly looked up to him and his disruption. "But we, all of us, really have to talk about me."

"That didn't sound a little narcissistic," George muttered to Fred, behind Harry. Fred snorted and Ron started snickering.

Harry ignored that comment, it really did sound a bit self absorbed, but he didn't know how else to put it, and he really had to continue before he cracked up laughing. This wasn't supposed to be humorous. "As we're all here right now," Harry motioned to the eavesdroppers behind him. "I thought it the best time to bring it up before I blow the entirety of Grimmauld Place to pieces with my frustration!" Harry stared at Dumbledore, daring him to say no.

"Very well, Harry, what is it you'd like to discuss?" Dumbledore said after a moment.

Harry could see the damnable amused twinkle in the old man's eyes. He breathed out a sigh of relief though; he really thought he was going to be kicked out for a minute there. "We're all Wizards... and Witches," Harry amended at the glares he got from the ladies and the jab to his ribs from Hermione. "And with being highly magical beings as we are, I would think that we would be able to expand our horizons a bit; in other words, Grimmauld Place. We have been here for two weeks, in that time I have not had one moment to myself, alone, at all. I enter a room, and there is always someone there. There is always someone following me. I can't even use the bathroom without there being someone directly outside the door! Do any of you realized we have one working bathroom, that's it?" Harry practically shouted all of that in one breath, and he took in a deep breath to finish. "I guess what I'm try to say is..."

"You want to expand Grimmauld Place and have some place that you can go alone and think," Sirius summed up.

"Yes, that's exactly what I'm saying."

"Sorry, Pup, but Grimmauld Place is expanded, largely expanded in fact. But I can probably do something about the bathroom situation. There are two on the third floor that I can renovate tomorrow morning," Sirius said consolingly.

Harry nearly whimpered at the thought of the rest of the summer with people constantly around him. He was used to being on his own at the Dursleys. "All right, then."

"Harry," Hermione suddenly said, her eyes lighting up. "If we remove the furniture in our rooms, how many tents do you think we can fit in them?"

Harry looked at Hermione oddly. "I don't know, two maybe three," he said.

"How many rooms are in one of our new tents?" Hermione asked.

Harry smiled brightly grabbed Hermione's face and kissed her smack on the lips. "Hermione you're a genius!" he exclaimed and ran out of the room and up the stairs.

"He just kissed me," Hermione said as everyone blinked at her. "He must be really, really happy."

--

It wasn't until Harry got up stairs, pushed his bed to the side of the room and erected one of their improved upon tents, that he realized that he had just kissed Hermione Granger. His face immediately went bright red with embarrassment and he dove inside the tent and hid in one of the back bedrooms. Boy did he hope Hermione didn't try and kill him... or maim him... or date him... He really couldn't deal with starting a relationship right now and it would be too weird for him to date one of his best friends anyways.

Nearly an hour of blessed alone time went by before a voice called cautiously inside the tent. It was Severus. "I'm back here," Harry called out, and he heard two people enter the tent and walk to the small back bedroom.

"These really did come out very nicely," Sirius said as he entered into the room, followed by Severus. Harry put the book he was reading aside. "So how're you doing?" Sirius asked, sitting down on his bed next to Harry as Severus sat down on his other side.

"Better, I'm sorry for interrupting the Order meeting," Harry said sheepishly.

"Ah, don't worry about it, Dumbledore was vastly amused, and the look on Miss Granger's face was priceless," Sirius chuckled.

"She's not going to try and kill me is she?" Harry asked fearfully.

"I don't believe that's on Miss Granger's agenda, Harry. Though, Sirius and I, for the first time in quite a while have finally agreed on something." Harry blinked at the two, this didn't sound ominous at all. "We think we should have the 'Talk' with you."

Harry looked between the two, stood up and left the tent. As soon as he was out into his bedroom he burst out laughing. Ron and Hermione were sitting on Ron's bed playing chess and stared at him as he doubled over, trying to catch his breath, he was laughing so hard.

"You think he's finally lost it?" Ron asked. Hermione could only stare at the Boy-Who-Lived as he cracked up.

Finally, Harry managed to get himself under control and squeaked out, "The Talk," before he swept back into the tent. Ron and Hermione both looked at each other and burst out laughing.

Harry walked back to the back bedroom and sat down between the two men again. He looked at both of them and then burst out laughing again. He couldn't help it.

"Alright, I think we get the picture, Harry, you can stop laughing," Severus said as he rolled his eyes.

"I'm sorry, but I think it's a bit late for that, do either of you realize how old I really am?"

Sirius laughed. "It is hard to remember that your mind is older than your body."

Harry nodded and then stood again. "I should go apologize to Hermione," he said and then left the tent again.

"Do you think he's ever...?" Sirius started, looking at Severus.

"If he has, I really don't want to know," Severus said and stood to follow Harry out of the tent, he wasn't about to miss the boy's humiliation at the hands of one Hermione Granger, she was a crafty Witch after all and he knew she wasn't about to let him live it down. Sirius was right on his heels.

--

Harry sat up abruptly and pulled his wand to him. He wasn't sure what had awoken him, but whatever it was, made him feel really uneasy. Harry looked over to Ron, sleeping in the bed across from him. His friend was still asleep, so whatever it was hadn't made any noise.

Harry looked around the room carefully, taking in every shadowed corner, but there was nothing. He sighed. He'd been getting uneasy feelings like this since school ended and it always seemed to wake him up from a dead sleep. Harry looked back to Ron, snoring softly and suddenly wished for a bit of solitude. The tents helped him during the days, helped everyone really, but the adults had decided that at night they should sleep in their own beds just in case something happened as it was near impossible to hear someone from inside the tents.

Harry laid back down to try and go back to sleep, but abruptly sat back up again, with the suddenly feeling that someone was standing in front of him. "Who's there?" he whispered, clutching at his wand.

"You're mine!"

Harry suddenly screamed and pointed his wand at the image that came charging towards him. It went through him and vanished just as Harry's unintentional spell splashed across the dresser, immediately engulfing the top of it in flames.

Ron sat up at Harry's yell and then leapt out of bed as he saw the flames over taking their dresser. "Aah!" Ron shouted and then grabbed his wand, but by the way he was gapping at the flames, he couldn't come up with a spell to put the fire out.

"Aguamenti!" came a voice from the door. It was Mrs. Weasley.

The fire was doused out and then Ron and Mrs. Weasley turned to look at Harry. Harry was staring straight ahead of him, shaking, his wand still raised.

"Harry?" asked Mrs. Weasley as she came closer to him. "Harry dear, it's alright, there's nothing there, you can lower your wand."



Harry didn't move, he just continued to stare at the spot the image had been. Ron moved closer to Harry. "Harry?" he asked hesitantly.

"What's going on?" Fred asked sleepily from the open door, where he, George, Ginny, and Hermione were standing.

"Move, please," Sirius suddenly said and the four moved out of the way as Remus ushered them back. Sirius sat down in front of Harry. "Harry?" he asked gently.

Harry slowly looked up to Sirius, not really looked at him though, and then he lowered his wand. But he couldn't stop shaking. He wasn't quite sure what he saw. A skull, red eyes, but it wasn't Voldemort. It had scared the shit out of him though and he had a feeling of dread in his heart.

"Harry, are you all right?" Sirius asked, placing a hand on his shaking arm.

Harry shook his head. "No, no, I – I think I j-just saw Death," Harry said shakily. The others all gasped and paled. Harry finally really looked at Sirius. "Sirius, I don't think he wanted to give me up."

Sirius wrapped his arms around his godson. "It's all right, I'm sure it was just a dream," he said soothingly.

Harry suddenly pushed Sirius away. "It wasn't a dream! I know what I saw!"

"Harry, calm down, please," Remus tried.

"You don't believe me," Harry stated and then looked around at the others, at Sirius. "None of you believe me." Harry suddenly pushed Sirius away and leapt out of bed.

"Harry..."

“Leave me alone!” Harry shouted and pushed passed the four standing in the doorway and then stormed down the hall and into the bathroom, slamming the door shut behind him.

Harry shakily looked at himself in the mirror and then took several steps back at what he saw, or rather who. “Voldemort,” he whispered.

“He’s bothering you too, isn’t he?” Harry stared back in confusion and horror. “Death, he wants us both, Potter. He wants us both and he is furious that he can’t have us. He almost had you, but those shards intervened.”

Harry looked down at the palm of his hand; the shards of the Philosopher’s Stone were glowing and quite visible under his skin. “Why,” Harry whispered. He wasn’t sure if he was asking his enemy or himself.

“You don’t know? But of course you and Dumbledore never found out the real reason I wanted the stone, did you?” Harry looked up at Voldemort. “It wasn’t only immortality. That is but one property of the stone. I suppose old Flamel never told his dear friend Dumbledore. How could he tell someone who’d lost so much; that he could bring people back from the dead?”

Harry looked back down at the shards again. “That’s not possible, you can’t bring people back from death,” Harry stated, but his voice wavered.

“Yes, Harry. You can bring your parents back.” Harry’s head shot up, to look at Voldemort in the mirror. “Didn’t I offer it? But you refused me, refused to hand over the stone.” Harry shook his head, he didn’t believe Voldemort; he couldn’t. “Of course you want proof. You are alive, that is your proof.”

“Go away,” Harry said shakily. Voldemort laughed darkly in the mirror and Harry’s scar throbbed. “I said go away!” Harry shouted and slammed his fists into the mirror, shattering it and then he fell back against the wall and slid down to the floor, his head in his hands as he tried not to let Voldemort’s words go to his head, his heart. “I can’t

bring them back from the dead,” Harry whispered to himself firmly and then again and again and again...

He didn't hear Sirius' pounding on the door; he didn't notice their shouts, asking if he was okay. He didn't even feel the magic trying to unlock the door, he didn't know he locked. Harry stared at the shards in his hand, the shards that had brought him from death again. Shakily Harry picked up a sharp piece of the broken mirror and brought it to his hand. He dug at his skin with the glass, over and over and over, but he couldn't get the shards out, they only seemed to sink further and further into his hand...

--

Severus and Dumbledore quickly walked up the stairs with Sirius. “He's been in there for hours. He won't answer us. I haven't heard anything but the mirror smashing and I think he was talking to himself before hand. There's not been a sound since. I can't get the door open with magic or otherwise, I even tried blasting a hole in the wall,” Sirius explained rapidly. They stopped in front of the bathroom door, where Remus was standing, still trying to get through the door; he stopped and moved out of the way when he saw them.

Severus knocked lightly on the door. “Harry, it's Severus, can you hear me?” Silence greeted them. “Harry, please answer me.” Severus looked at Dumbledore.

Dumbledore waved his wand over the door, he tried it several times, but each time nothing happened. Dumbledore's brow furrowed as he tried a revealing charm to see what was holding the door closed but it appeared as if there was no magic at all on the room.

Severus raised an eyebrow and tried the doorknob. It turned and the door opened. He stepped into the room and looked around until he spotted Harry sitting against the wall, glass surrounding him, staring blankly at his hand that was dripping blood all over the bathroom floor. “Harry?” he said hesitantly as he knelt down in front of him.

“I can't bring them back from the dead,” Harry whispered hoarsely, not looking up at Severus. “I can't...”

“Harry...”

“Severus,” Dumbledore said quietly and motioned for the man to move out of the way. Dumbledore knelt down in front of Harry. “Harry, who can’t you bring back from the dead?”

“My parents,” Harry whispered. “Voldemort said I could... But I won’t, I can’t...”

“When did you speak with Voldemort, how?” Dumbledore asked with alarm in his voice. Harry looked up at the remains of the mirror. And Dumbledore followed his gaze as did Sirius, Remus and Severus.

“He wants both of us, but he can’t have us,” Harry said looking down at his hand again.

“Who, Harry?” Severus asked tentatively.

“Death,” Harry answered. “He’s mad because he can’t have us, because we can’t die.”

--

AN: Sorry it’s been so long, thank you for all your great reviews and yes the last chapter’s title does allude to the Princess Bride, I love that movie. More to come very soon, I promise!

## Chapter Thirty-Four – Results and Falling Out

Harry sat down at the breakfast table, early the morning after his birthday. Harry had done a lot of avoiding of people, mainly his friends in the last couple weeks. It wasn't an easy thing to do, even with the tents. He just didn't feel comfortable with the looks he got, but he'd done a rather well job of it. It seemed as everyone had even forgotten his birthday. Harry had thought they'd throw him a massive party, but he hadn't even got one happy birthday.

Harry wasn't sure how to take that. He was used to the Dursley's forgetting, with the exception of the year before where he had a small birthday party, the first ever at the Dursley's. But it wasn't a grand event; it was quiet, with just the Dursley's and him. It was quite nice. But it seemed everyone was ignoring it this year. Well a lot had been happening... Disappearances, deaths, injuries; Voldemort hadn't appeared to the public since Christmas, but his Death Eaters had been making a right mess of things.

It was so early, not even Mrs. Weasley was up and Harry sat enjoying the silence. Harry'd not had another vision of Death since his rather one-sided conversation with Voldemort, and Harry kind of hoped that Death was bothering his enemy relentlessly. After all, it wasn't as if Harry was trying to come back to life, he didn't really have a choice, it just happened.

Harry rubbed his palm with his thumb. There wasn't even a scar where he'd tried to dig out the shards. Harry looked down at his hand and wondered if he'd ever be able to die, he didn't fancy living forever. Forever was a very long time.

A small hoot sounded in the kitchen and Harry looked up to see a brown barn owl sitting on the table. He hadn't noticed it come into the kitchen. The owl hooted again and held out the letter it had in its beak. Harry reached out and took it and the owl flew off through the kitchen door, probably to fly out an open window somewhere in the house.

Harry saw the letter was addressed to him and as he opened it, wondered who it could be from. He quickly found out as he stared at his OWL results. He'd almost forgotten about them.

“Hey, Harry, what’s that?” Ron suddenly asked from the door.

Harry looked up at his friend. “Umm...” Harry’d not told his friends yet about his moving up a year. Harry folded his results and tried to hide them. “Nothing, just a letter from Severus,” Harry lied, looking away from Ron.

“Oh,” Ron said and looked a bit disappointed.

Harry wasn’t sure if Ron knew he was lying or not, or if he was just disappointed that he wasn’t being let in on Harry’s secrets anymore. But Ron didn’t question him, just sat at the other end of the kitchen table, away from Harry. Harry frowned; Ron had been doing that a lot lately.

It wasn’t long before the kitchen was full of people; Mrs. Weasley making breakfast and everyone chatting, more and more conversation going around as the smell of breakfast woke the house and the table filled up quickly.

Harry fidgeted and debated leaving. He didn’t know why the crowd was making him anxious. But as the noise level grew, he wished that they would all just be quiet. Harry closed his eyes. It wasn’t even words to him anymore, just a dull roar. Finally Harry couldn’t take it anymore and stood. “Could you all just be...?” Harry didn’t finish as silence settled over the kitchen. There was no way he could have just done that. He didn’t even have his wand out.

Everyone started to look around themselves for the person who’d put a Silencing Charm on them all. Harry gaped as they first turned on Fred and George, but soon found out it wasn’t them, and then they noticed him standing, staring at them all with his mouth hanging open.

“I didn’t...” Harry stopped, he couldn’t be sure. “I mean, I wanted...” Glares started to be sent his way. “I’ll fix it.” Harry stated and pulled out his wand. He tried the Finite, but it didn’t work. “Oops,” Harry chuckled and walked over to the fireplace. “I’ll fix it,” he said again and threw in some Floo Powder. “Hogwarts, Dumbledore’s office,” Harry said and stuck his head in the Floo.

Oh he hated this feeling. He really hoped the headmaster was in his office. Finally things settled and Harry could see Dumbledore's office from floor level. He was surprised to see Severus first and then Dumbledore sitting behind his desk.

"Umm, Professor," Harry said a bit nervously. The two men hadn't noticed him before, but they certainly took notice now. "Hello, I seem to have a small problem," Harry said.

"Harry Potter and a small problem," Severus said with an eyebrow raised. "I didn't think there was such a thing."

Harry would have rolled his eyes, but it would have looked weird in the fire. "A small problem," Harry said again. "I seem to have accidentally silenced everyone, without my wand, or saying anything, and, and I can't reverse it. Not to mention I'm not really allowed to be doing magic outside of school, so..."

Dumbledore and Severus stared at Harry for a moment and then looked at each other. "Stand back, Harry, we're coming through," Dumbledore said finally.

Harry pulled himself from the fireplace, only to be met with glares all around. "I really don't know how I did it. Dumbledore will fix it, I'm sure," Harry chuckled and stepped away from the fireplace.

Dumbledore and Severus came through not long after. Severus took one look at all of their facing and started laughing. Dumbledore followed suite, Harry couldn't help it and cracked up too. Everyone just rolled their eyes and sighed silently.

Finally Dumbledore tried to reverse the spell, but nothing happened. "Oh dear," he said the twinkle in his eyes growing. "Harry, my boy, what exactly did you do?"

Harry stared at Dumbledore, trying to figure that out himself. "I thought... it," Harry finally said and then nodded. That sounded about right. "Yes, I thought it."

"You thought it?" Severus asked incredulously.

Harry nodded. "Yeah, I know it sounds weird, but that's exactly what I did."

"Wonderful," Dumbledore suddenly exclaimed and everyone looked at him. "Absolutely marvelous," he chuckled. "I knew you'd be able to do it one day, but so soon and without your adult level of magic. I'm rather impressed."

Harry blinked at the headmaster. "Umm, explain, please, sir."

"Oh, of course, wandless magic!" said Dumbledore joyously.

"Wandless magic, great, I can do wandless magic now," Harry muttered. "That doesn't help them though," Harry said pointing to the now shocked group.

"Of course it does," Dumbledore stated and Harry raised an eyebrow at him. "Wandless magic can't be undone by a wand, unless it can be overpowered, which is very rare. You must use wandless magic to counter it," Dumbledore lectured with a smile on his face.

"You want me to think undoing the spell," Harry said, catching on.

"Yes," said Dumbledore.

Harry looked at the Weasley's, Hermione, Remus, and Sirius and then closed his eyes and thought about his silencing spell ending. He thought really hard and then opened one eye and then the other and then sighed in relief.

"You're in big trouble mister," Sirius said.

Harry held up his hands. "Hey, I didn't know I could do wandless magic." Harry's eyes widened when Sirius and his chair suddenly floated off the floor.

"Harry!"



"I didn't..."

A chuckling came from Fred and George who had their wands pointed at Sirius, levitating him.

"Fred, George, put him down this instant!" Mrs. Weasley exclaimed and everyone laughed as they lowered Sirius to the floor again.

"Sorry, couldn't resist," the twins intoned.

Dumbledore turned to Harry. "I believe we will add an extra lesson for your new schedule this year, Harry. By the way, did you receive your scores this morning?" he asked.

Harry looked at the now curious group. Only Remus, Sirius, and Severus knew he'd taken his OWLs early, and they perked up significantly. Harry hesitated and then pulled out the letter from his pocket. "Yes, Sir, I think I did remarkably well," Harry said with just a bit of pride, he had done exceptionally well, better than even he thought he'd do.

"Well?" Severus said, looking like he was about to take the results from him to see what he'd gotten.

Harry took a deep breath and read off the list. "E in Runes, E in Arithmancy, E in Astronomy, O in Magical Creatures, O in Charms, O in Defense Against the Dark Arts, O in Herbology, E in History, O in Transfiguration," Harry recited from the list carefully, a blush brightening his cheeks with each letter spoken.

Sirius was suddenly beside him with the results in his hands. "No way, I mean even... I mean wow, Harry this is outstanding!" Sirius beamed hugging his shoulders, Harry smiled.

"You stressed so much and see... Congratulations, Harry!" Remus exclaimed.

"Wait a minute, you're missing a grade. What did you get in Potions?" Severus asked, trying to take Harry's results from Sirius, who held them away.

"I tried my best, Severus, I really did," Harry said looking down at his feet with a heavy sigh. But then Sirius couldn't take it and barked out a laugh at the shocked look on Severus' face. Harry smirked up at Severus and then smiled toothily. "I got an Outstanding," Harry laughed.

"Don't do that to me, you nearly gave me a heart attack, we studied so hard for that and..." Severus took a deep breath and let it out. "Well done, Harry," Severus smiled as he ruffling his hair, "Really well done."

"Very well done indeed, my boy," Dumbledore said proudly.

Hermione suddenly raised her hand. "I-I have an idea, but exactly what are we exclaiming over?" she asked from her seat at the table. Everyone else was looking on with curiosity as well.

"You haven't told them yet?" Severus asked.

Harry ran his hand through his hair. "I haven't really had the... No," Harry said sheepishly.

"Well you might want to tell them now, cub," Remus said. "I think they might riot if they don't find out soon. Or perhaps just Miss Granger," he chuckled, looking at the Witch on the edge of her seat.

"Harry, what's going on?" Ron asked.

"I'm going into sixth year," Harry said and then held his breath.

"What, wait, you're not sixteen; how can you be going into sixth year?" Hermione questioned.

"I took my OWL's early," Harry said slowly.

"Why didn't you tell us you were going to take your OWL's early, how are you allowed to do that?" Hermione asked, looking completely confused. "I mean I would have helped you study!"

“Harry’s been doing remarkably well in all of his classes and the professors have been coming to me all year with this news,” Dumbledore explained with a smile and Harry sighed, thankful that the headmaster had taken over. “I decided, after having a chat with them and him, to move him up a year if he so chose.”

“I hadn’t realized he was doing so well,” Mrs. Weasley said with a smile on her face. “And those scores, they’re absolutely amazing, Harry. Well done.”

“You chose to move up a year?” Ron asked, ignoring his mother’s praise of Harry. “But what about us, Harry, don’t you want to be our friend anymore?” Ron looked genuinely hurt.

“Of course I do!” Harry exclaimed. “I’m still going to be in the same dorm and everything until I graduate, I’m just not going to be in your classes anymore, and after I graduate, I’ll still be at the school, because I plan on working on my Masteries through Severus,” Harry explained quickly. “So I’ll still be around and everything,” Harry said with a smile.

“But you won’t be in our classes, who am I going to sit with in class? Study with? Did you even think about us?” Ron asked angrily, standing from the table.

“Ron I’m sure he thought about us, but...” Hermione started quietly.

“No, Ron, actually I didn’t. I thought it was time that for once I thought about myself for a change,” Harry said, getting angry himself.

“Yourself, you always think about yourself! We always think about you, but you’re too busy with your head in your ass to notice!” Ron shouted.

“Ronald Weasley!” Mrs. Weasley exclaimed.

“Yeah, you’re always thinking about me,” Harry scoffed. “I’m not the one who forgot my birthday,” Harry said almost calmly and left the kitchen in a dead silence that wasn’t magical this time.

--

Harry sat with a book in his hands in front of the small fireplace in Grimmauld Place's rather extensive dark library, he didn't mean dim when he referred to it as dark either. Most of the books were focused on the Dark Arts. The room was technically off limits because of this. But that was exactly why Harry was sitting in there now.

It was a couple nights before they were to head back to Hogwarts and an Order meeting was going on downstairs, and for once, Harry didn't care to listen in on it. He hadn't even sent in Dobby as he normally did.

Harry wasn't hiding in the library to avoid anyone in particular, even Ron, who he'd taken to just avoiding himself the last few days. Ron hadn't spoken to Harry in the last month. Everyone else had been trying to get Ron to come out of his self-imposed silence around Harry, but it seemed like his friend had really turned his back on him this time. Not even Hermione could get Ron to see reason. He knew Ron, Ginny, Fred and George were most likely trying to spy on the Order meeting. Hermione was probably trying to talk them out of it. But Harry didn't care much about any of that.

Harry was hiding because he was worried. His magic was growing. The wandless magic was only the first signs of it. Dumbledore had said that with wandless magic one could only do simple spells, like locking doors, silencing spells, even levitation. Certainly nothing above second year spell work, and mainly charms at that. But Harry could do so much more. Things he didn't think should be possible. And that was the real reason he was worried. Harry had quickly discovered that if he could think it, he could do it.

The truth of the matter was no one should be as powerful as he was becoming, and Harry didn't for the life of him know why his magic was growing so much. The only thing he could think of that was the cause for it was him dying and coming back. But then that didn't even make sense. Harry wanted to get back to the school and to Founder's Library and see if maybe they had answer, but at the same time, Harry was afraid to go back. How would the school's magic affect his

own? The dark current was already calling to him, how much harder would it be to resist now?

Harry sighed and looked into the low burning fire; at least he hadn't had any visits from Voldemort or Death. Harry suddenly looked up when the library door clicked open. Severus, Remus and Sirius came in and closed the door behind them. The Order meeting must have just gotten out for the three of them to be there. They were the only ones who knew that Harry was in the library and why.

"Fine anything, pup," Sirius asked, taking a seat next to him.

Harry shook his head. "No, I'm going to have to go to the Chamber when I get back to school, but Mort will be pleased to see me. He may even know what's happening to me, he's pretty in tune to my magic."

"I still don't know if I like the idea of you hanging out with a fully grown Basilisk in the chamber of Salazar Slytherin," Sirius said.

"Eh, Mort's harmless, at least this time around. I don't know if I can say the same for the one hibernating though," Harry chuckled.

"Just promise me you're being careful down there," Sirius said with a bit of concern.

Harry smiled. "Don't worry, I am. Really you should come down with me sometime, though. Remus has been down dozens of times, as has Severus."

"It may be fascinating, but I think I'll pass on that, Harry. I don't like the idea of being in such close proximity to a Basilisk, shrunk or not. I still can't believe you're a Parselmouth," Sirius said with a shiver.

Harry chuckled. "You'll get used to it. It unnerved Severus when he first found out too."

"You still sound creepy when you talk to Mortedolv," Severus said with amusement.

"That he does," Remus chuckled and Harry smirked in amusement.

"Listen, pup," Sirius said after a few moments of silence. "We've been talking, and we think it's time you told Dumbledore the truth."

Harry looked at the three and then shook his head. "No, I'm sorry, but I can't, not yet, he's not ready to know. And to be honest, I don't think he'll ever be ready."

"All the more reason you should tell him, cub," Remus said calmly, keeping his voice soothing as to not set Harry off. "Your magic is growing, Hogwarts is becoming more enticing, and your connection with the Dark Lord..." Remus sighed. "Harry, we're afraid your connection with Voldemort is only getting stronger."

Harry looked away from Remus and into the fire. He knew all of this and he was terrified of what it all meant, but that was exactly why he couldn't tell Dumbledore. He could only imagine what the old man's reaction would be. Probably lock him up and take away the key just to prevent him from becoming like Riddle.

Harry sighed heavily and looked back up at the three. "No, I'm not telling him," Harry said resolutely.

"Harry," Severus tried.

Harry frowned. "And neither are any of you. I want an oath," Harry said firmly. It wasn't that he didn't trust them. He just couldn't have his secret spread any further around.

"What?" Sirius asked with incredulity in his eyes.

Harry stood up and looked each of them in the eyes. "You heard me. I want an oath on your magic that you won't tell anyone about me being from the future or that I'm the Protector of Hogwarts."

"You can't be serious, Harry, we wouldn't tell if you didn't want us to, you know that," Remus stated calmly.

"Do I?" Harry asked, looking back at the Werewolf.

Severus sighed. "You already have mine, Harry. I have told no one and will not break my oath."

Harry nodded and looked at Sirius and Remus. Sirius sighed but then gave his oath. As the magic settle with his oath, Harry looked to Remus.

Remus stared back him and then with a heavy breath, shook his head. "I can't, Harry, I'm sorry. I won't tell Dumbledore, not yet, but I won't swear an oath on that."

"I'll Oblivate you if you don't," Harry said, but his voice wavered.

Remus stood. "Then you're going to have to Oblivate me."

Harry stared hard at Remus for a long moment until Remus turned to leave the room. He was just at the door when Harry shakily pointed his wand at the man's back. "Remus, please," Harry pleaded.

Remus looked back at the three of them, at Harry and shook his head. Harry closed his eyes and then dropped his wand and looked at his feet, he couldn't do it. Remus left and Harry sat back down with his head in his hands. He couldn't believe he had almost Oblivated one of the few people who had stuck with him through to the end of his life.

--

A/N: See another chapter, just as I promised.

## Chapter Thirty-Five – Losses

Harry sat down alone on the Hogwarts Express. Ron and Hermione were away at their Prefects meeting and Fred, George, and Ginny were off sitting with their own friends. Harry should have been getting a head start on his reading, as he had only just gotten his books the day before, but he couldn't muster the energy.

Ron still wasn't talking to him, he hadn't seen Remus since the night of the Order meeting, and Sirius and Severus weren't all that happy with him. Harry wasn't happy with himself either.

Harry stood up to lock the door so he could be left alone for the train ride, but before he could there was a knock at the door. Harry hesitated but opened it. He didn't expect to see Draco Malfoy on the other side. Harry just blinked as Draco stood there in silence. "Is there something I can help you with?" he finally asked.

"Umm, can I sit with you?" he asked haltingly.

Harry stared at Draco for another moment and then stepped aside. "Sure," he said with a shrug.

Draco dragged his trunk in and then flicked his wand to get it up in the overhead compartment opposite to Harry's trunk and then he sat down across from Harry. "Thanks for letting me sit here, everywhere else seems to be full," Draco said quietly. Harry only nodded, not commenting on why he wasn't sitting with the other Slytherins. "Are Granger and Weasley going to be joining us?" he asked after a few moments where neither said anything.

"Probably not Ron, but he and Hermione are Prefects anyways," Harry said with a frown and that was when he noticed that Draco didn't have a Prefect badge. "I thought you would have made Prefect too," Harry tried to say casually, but there was no disguising the obvious question.

Draco shook his head. "I was supposed to be, but I turned it down. I didn't want the added pressure during OWL's year." Harry was rather



surprised by that, but he didn't comment. He didn't have any desire to be a Prefect either.

The two elapsed into silence again, but it was a comfortable silence. Harry looked out of their window as the scenery rolled passed and Draco pulled a book from his bag to read. Harry was just about to get one himself when another knock came at the door. Harry opened it to find several Gryffindors, Ravenclaws, and Hufflepuffs on the other side, and it looked like Neville Longbottom was leading them all.

"Hello, Harry, can we come in? I-I mean if it's alright with – with you Draco," Neville stuttered after noticing the blond.

Draco looked at the large group of fifth years for a moment and then shrugged. "If you like," he said and moved over closer to the window as they all filed in.

There wasn't enough room on the benches for them all so some sat on the floor. Harry looked over the group curiously as everyone got situated and then he turned to Neville. "Was there just not enough compartments left?" Harry asked with amusement. Almost every fifth year Hufflepuff, Gryffindor, and Ravenclaw were jammed into the compartment.

"Actually, we, the Gryffindors anyways, heard about you moving up a year and wanted to know if it was true?" Neville asked.

Harry nodded. "Yeah, it's true, but that doesn't explain why you're all crammed like sardines into this compartment."

The group chuckled. "Actually, Neville was telling us how you helped him in Potions and with some of his other classes," Hannah Abbot said from the floor. "And we got talking and with some other people and..."

"Well we were wondering if you wouldn't mind tutoring us, as a group, if you have time," Lavender Brown finished for Hannah and the others nodded. Harry stared at the lot.

“He says you’re a really good teacher, and it being OWL’s year and all, we thought a bit of extra study wouldn’t hurt,” Padma Patil said from where she sat beside her twin.

“And maybe a little bit of extra Defense training, wouldn’t go amiss,” Dean Thomas said with a chuckle.

Harry continued to stare at the group, he hadn’t thought of putting the DA or anything similar together at all. It hadn’t even crossed his mind. But here they all were, perhaps it wouldn’t be such a bad idea.

“I wouldn’t mind getting in on this,” Draco said, bringing Harry around from his thoughts. “If you’re willing to teach us, I’m certainly willing to learn.”

“I suppose we could start a group study session or something...” Harry said; the gears in his head turning, and then a small smile came to his lips. “Actually, I have a better idea. Meet me on the seventh floor, next to the tapestry of Barnabas the Barmy right after dinner tomorrow night, and bring anyone who wants to learn.”

“Anyone?” asked Seamus.

“Anyone, I don’t care about year or house. If they want to learn, bring them,” Harry said; a gleam coming into his eyes, almost a twinkle.

The compartment door suddenly opened and Hermione stared gaping at the large group before her. “Did I miss something? Are we trying to see how many of one class we can fit into a compartment?” she asked.

“Yes,” Harry answered and everyone started laughing.

--

Harry sat down at the Welcome Feast next to Hermione; Ron was sitting further down by his sister, blatantly ignoring him. “Do you think he’ll ever forgive me?” Harry asked quietly. Hermione looked at Harry with sympathy in her eyes.

"I don't know, Harry, he's still pretty angry. But I don't think it has to do with you moving up a year," Hermione said, bighting her lip.

Harry looked up to her. "Then why is he angry with me, what did I do?"

"Harry when you d-died, I think that scared him. It scared us all, but I think Ron's always assumed you'd be here and then you weren't and..."

"And now I'm moving up a year, and it's like I'm leaving him again," Harry whispered with understanding in his eyes. Hermione nodded sadly. "Maybe I should just ask Dumbledore to keep me with the fifth year class," Harry sighed.

"No, Harry, you need this, for yourself. I've seen how bored you are in class, and though I'm going to miss my study partner, you need to move on."

Harry smiled crookedly at Hermione. "I'll have your help with the club anyways, right?"

"Hell yes!" Harry snorted when Hermione suddenly clapped her hand over her mouth. "I mean, yes, of course," she giggled. "This is going to be so cool, and the Professors are going to be absolutely in shock when students start getting O's on their tests and stuff."

Harry chuckled. "I can't wait to see the look on Severus' face when students start brewing potions correctly on the first try," Harry chuckled.

"Do you think the seventh years will really help teach us?" Hermione asked.

"I think so, and it will help them review for their NEWT's. Besides I'm going to be teaching them some of the things, Severus' has been showing me, and I know of at least a handful of them that won't turn that down." Harry said quietly.

"We're not telling Dumbledore about this, right?" Hermione whispered.

“There’s nothing in the rules about starting a study club, but I don’t see the need to tell any of the professors, they’ll find out eventually anyways, if the numbers I’m expecting come to the Room of Requirement tomorrow night.”

Hermione smiled. “I can’t wait to see the look on the Professors’ faces when they see all the houses working together.” Harry nodded in agreement.

Harry looked down the table at Ron, when he caught him looking in his and Hermione’s direction. Ron sneered and turned away. Harry sighed. If Ron was so afraid of losing him, why was he trying to push him away? Harry’s attention was diverted as the first years were led into the Hall.

Harry wasn’t surprised when the sorting hat again gave it’s warning about uniting the houses, and Hermione nudged him with a small smile on her lips. Harry just shrugged and he clapped for the hat. “Who knew?” Harry whispered.

While everyone else was busy talking about the Hat’s new song, Harry was looking over the staff for their reactions. That was when he noticed something amiss; the addition to the staff table and the lack of Remus Lupin. “Hermione, where’s Remus,” Harry whispered as soon as he noticed him missing.

Hermione scanned over the staff table herself and shook her head. “I don’t know, but who’s that?” Hermione pointed to the woman, sitting primly at the end of the staff table. They already knew about Hagrid being gone for a while, but no one had mentioned anything about a new staff member.

She was skinny and had a pale complexion, but her posture indicated no weakness. She looked out over the students with a stern blue-eyed glare. Her brown hair was tied into a neat bun at the base of her neck and her impeccable deep blue robes broke no argument that she was one for absolute perfection. Harry was a little intimidated by her.

“She can’t be taking over for Remus, can she?” Hermione asked with a bit of concern in her voice.

Harry shook his head. “Why would she? Remus has been doing great at the job, and the governors all know about his condition. There wouldn’t be a reason for him to step down.”

“But if she’s not here to take over Remus’ job, where is he? And why is she here?” Hermione asked quietly.

“I’m sure we’ll find out in a minute,” Harry muttered as Dumbledore finally stood up, just as the last first year was sorted into Hufflepuff and the hat was taken away.

As the clapping came to an end at the Hufflepuff table, Dumbledore gave everyone a smile, but to Harry, who knew the man rather well, it was forced. “To our newcomers, welcome, and to our old hands, welcome back. I have a few announcements, but I’ll leave those until our stomachs are full. Tuck in!”

“I was sure he would have told us before we ate,” Harry muttered and then began to fill his plate. “It can’t be that she’s taking Remus’ job though,” Harry said to Hermione as they dug into their food. “I mean we’ve seen him nearly all summer, someone would have mentioned something, him or otherwise, if he wasn’t going to be at Hogwarts this year.”

Hermione nodded in agreement, but she had a worried look in her eyes. The look suddenly turned to disgust as she looked down the table at Ron, who was talking to Sir Nicholas with his mouth so full, bits of food were coming out.

“Will he ever grow up?” Hermione said hotly as she looked away. Harry shook his head and looked away himself as Nick floated off with an affronted look on his face. Harry was surprised when the ghost stopped next to him a few minutes later.

“Mr. Potter, how are you?” Nick asked.

"I'm doing okay, thank you, Sir Nicholas. Do you know why Remus Lupin isn't at the staff table?" Harry asked on a whim.

Nick looked up at the staff table and frowned slightly. "The ministry is trying to interfere with your education again," Nick said, shaking his head slightly.

"What do you mean?" asked Hermione.

"They are requiring certain subjects to be taught only by Masters or Mistresses of that subject. The last time this happened was during the reign of Gellert Grindelwald," Nick said still looking up at the staff table.

"Well that can't be so bad," Hermione said uncertainly but then she caught the look in Harry's eyes.

"Remus isn't a Master," Harry confirmed.

"It's all well in good to have more experienced individuals teaching Defense Against the Dark Arts, Potions, Transfiguration, and Charms," Nick said as he turned away from the staff table. "But the Ministry should keep their hands out of the school and allow the Headmaster and Governors to choose who they want to teach you all."

"Does that mean Remus isn't going to be teaching us anymore?" Hermione asked, but before Nick could answer, Dumbledore rose to his feet and the hall fell silent.

"Well now that we are all digesting another magnificent feast, I beg a few moments of your attention for the usual start-of-term notices," Dumbledore said as he looked out over the Hall. "First years ought to know that the forest in the grounds is out of bounds to students – and a few of our older students ought to know by now too."

Harry and Hermione shared a knowing smirk and then brought their attention back to the headmaster.

“Mr. Filch, the caretaker, has asked me, for what he tells me is the four hundred and sixty-second time, to remind you all that magic is not permitted in corridors between classes, nor are a number of other things, all of which can be checked on the extensive list now fastened to Mr. Filch’s office door. If the esteemed Weasley twins would allow Mr. Filch to see his office door before you head off to your dormitory tonight, it would be most appreciated.”

Snickering came from the hall, much of it down the Gryffindor table where Fred and George were sitting, being congratulated on their prank well done and being given condolences on being caught out. The twins were eating it up.

“We have had a few changes in staffing this year,” Dumbledore continued, once the hall had fallen quiet again. The amusement that had been on his face was now gone. “We are very pleased to welcome back Professor Grubbly-Plank, who will be taking Care of Magical Creatures lessons until Professor Hagrid can return from his holiday.”

A smattering of applause followed as Dumbledore paused, but the majority of the students remained silent, obviously wanting to know who this new teacher was and what she was going to be teaching. Harry himself was on the edge of his seat, even though he’d already figured out that she was obviously here to teach Defense, but he really wanted to know where Remus was, he had a sinking feeling in his stomach.

Dumbledore continued. “This has not been formally announced to the public as of yet, but the Ministry has decided to enact their Educational Decree Seventeen, in light of the recent developments with the Dark Lord and his followers. In accordance with the Decree, professors of Charms, Defense Against the Dark Arts, Transfigurations, and Potions must hold a Mastery level in that field to teach at Hogwarts.” Dumbledore let this information settle a moment before he continued.

“Unfortunately, Professor Lupin does not meet this standard, but do not worry, he’s not left us, he will be staying on staff to help Professor Black with the Dueling class and assist with Defense Against the

Dark Arts.” Harry frowned, he hadn’t said where Remus was, and Sirius was looking at the table in front of him and not at Dumbledore like the rest of the staff. “With that said, I would like to introduce Mistress Elena Mordant who will be taking over Potions.”

There was a simultaneous shocked gasp from the students; even Harry had his mouth hanging open as Hermione tugged on his robe. “Did he just say what I think he said,” she whispered, Harry could only stare up at the staff table as whispers went up and down the hall.

“Professor Severus Snape, as you all may have guessed, will be the new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher this year.” Even more whispered swept the hall at that announcement. Harry didn’t know how to react. The last time Severus had been given the position, Harry had been incensed, but now he didn’t know if he should be happy for his surrogate father or not, and the expression on Severus face didn’t give away whether or not he was pleased himself.

A smattering of polite applause followed, but Harry just looked down at the table as Dumbledore finished his announcements about Quidditch tryouts and sent them off to bed. “Harry,” Hermione whispered. “I have to go escort the first years, but Professor Dumbledore didn’t say where Remus is, maybe you should ask him.” She said and got up to usher the first years together.

Harry decided to do just that and made his way to the head table where the Professors were starting to leave themselves. He looked over the staff table as he walked, this time really taking them in. It was Sirius that gave it away, his complexion, the lost look in his eyes, and Harry knew. He stopped in his tracks.

“Where’s Remus?” Harry interrupted Dumbledore who was talking quietly with Severus. He suddenly had a really bad feeling.

“Harry,” Severus said quietly, reaching out to Harry. Harry took a step back and shook his head. By now several people had noticed and were looking on, stopping other people with their curiosity, who stopped others. “Harry, please,” he said quietly.



“Just tell me. Is he dead?” Harry asked heavily, this got even more attention and the hall suddenly went silent as students stopped leaving.

Severus took a deep breath and looked out over the students staring at them. “We don’t know, he’s been captured by Death Eaters.” The hall was even more silent at that.

--

A/N: I know another cliffy, don’t worry next chapter will be up as soon as I edit it.

## Chapter Thirty-Six – The Club

Hermione Granger sat by the door in the Room of Requirement watching as her friend shot curse after curse at a stationary dummy. She'd never seen Harry like this before and it worried her. They'd been in the room for hours now and Harry had not relented in his spell fire. He hadn't said a word the whole time and Hermione was wary to interrupt him. The fact of the matter was she was scared of him.

Hermione jumped slightly as a really powerful blasting curse tore apart the dummy. She was rather surprised that the wall behind it was still intact actually. She could feel the power of it from where she sat several yards away. Harry seemed to slump after that one and Hermione took the opportunity to interrupt before he started again.

"Harry," she said hesitantly. "It's way past curfew, we should go before we're caught out of bounds."

Harry looked over at his friend and then nodded. "Go ahead; I'm staying a while longer."

"But, Harry..." Hermione shook her head and sighed, "All right, just don't get caught."

"I won't, I've got the cloak," Harry said quietly and then he turned back to the dummy that had righted itself at Harry's request.

Hermione looked at her friend in concern for a few moments more, but then left the room. Harry slumped down to the floor as soon as she was gone and put his head in his hands. He'd been waiting for her to leave for quite some time now, but she was too worried about him to leave him alone.

He didn't blame her; he had barely said a word since he had found out about Remus. He was honestly surprised Severus and Sirius hadn't dragged him out of the room yet, or stopped him from storming out of the Hall at all.

After a few moments he got back to his feet and instead of aiming his wand he lifted his right hand and aimed it at the dummy. He thought about Voldemort and how much he wanted to hurt him at that very moment. A beam of crimson light erupted from his palm and the dummy exploded in a ball of fire.

Harry stared at the spot the dummy had been and then suddenly sway from exhaustion. He collapsed to the ground, unconscious before he could even require a soft surface to land on.

--

Hermione made to walked out of Defense class, hoping not to get called to stay. She was a bit sore at Harry's lack of appearance for the entire day. He wasn't at breakfast and she could only assume that he'd gone to his own classes. But he hadn't been at lunch either and by the look on Snape's face during class, he hadn't attended his Defense class, which was right before the fifth years'.

"Miss Granger," Snape said lightly and she stopped in her tracks, wincing slightly as she turned around.

"Yes, Professor?" asked Hermione somewhat nervously.

Snape stalked towards her menacingly. "Harry isn't sick, he's not injured," he stated as he stopped in front of her. "Professor McGonagall informed me that he wasn't in her class, nor was he in Charms. He wasn't at breakfast, or at lunch, and I suspect that he won't be at dinner. Where is he?"

"I..." Hermione began. "I have no idea. I left him in the Room of Requirement late last night and he's not there now and I haven't seen him since," she said in one breath.

"He's been missing the entire day, and you've said nothing?" Snape said dangerously and Hermione took a step back, now looking rather guilty, she knew she should have mentioned something earlier.

"He was really upset yesterday. He spent most of the night blowing up things in the Room of Requirement. I thought maybe he just

needed space. I was going to say something if he wasn't at dinner," Hermione placated.

"Indeed, and we better hope that he is there," Snape said with a tired sigh and motioned for Hermione to go. Hermione practically ran out of the Defense classroom.

She bit her lip as she entered the Great Hall for dinner and noticed the lack of her friend. She debated for a moment sitting with Ron, but then decided just to sit at the end of the table in case Harry finally showed up. She really hoped he showed up.

--

Severus was on his way to Sirius' office to inform him of Harry's disappearance, when he heard a scuffling noise through the ajar office door. Wand drawn he barged into Sirius' office only to be met with a sight he hadn't expected to see.

Remus was sitting shakily on Sirius' floor, obviously just having come through the fireplace and Sirius was kneeling down next to him, trying to get the bruised and bloody man to talk. Severus moved over to Remus' side right away.

"My God, Lupin, how did you get away?" Severus asked once it was apparent the man had relaxed enough to communicate.

"I have no idea. It was pure luck, it had to be. He was standing over me with a wand pointed at my heart and the next thing I knew he was screaming and clutching his head. The Death Eaters moved to help their lord and I was able to slip away. It took me a while to get out of the manor though. I was nearly caught a couple of times," Remus said with a dazed look and then he focused on Severus. "I got snatches of conversation, something about Harry hurting Voldemort, but that's impossible, right?"

Severus looked between Remus and Sirius. "Harry's not been in any of his classes today, or at meals."

--

Harry slid silently into a seat next to Hermione and started to pull food towards him without saying anything or looking at her. "Harry, where have you been?" Hermione asked quietly. "Professor Snape asked where you were, why didn't you go to your classes today?"

Harry didn't answer, just stared at the table and would have continued if Hermione hadn't grabbed his arm. Harry hissed in pain and pulled his arm away. Hermione abruptly let go and stared at Harry with fear in her eyes.

"Harry, please tell me you haven't started again," Hermione whispered.

Harry stood up from the table and looked away from Hermione. "I haven't started again," he said and then walked out of the hall.

Hermione stared after him for a moment and then hurriedly followed after him. "Harry, Harry, please wait," she said as soon as she caught up with him. Harry slowed marginally but continued walking until they arrived at the Room of Requirement. "What happened? I mean I know you're upset about Remus, but..."

"I hurt Voldemort," Harry said quietly as soon as they were in the room.

Hermione stopped. "What?"

Harry turned around to face his friend. "After you left last night, all I could think about was how much I wanted to hurt him for taking Remus. I lifted my hand," Harry lifted his hand shakily as he said this. "And then a beam of magic shot at the dummy and it burst into flames. I collapsed after that, but when I woke up, I wasn't awake." Harry lowered his hand and leaned against the wall. "I was seeing through his eyes. He was standing over Remus, ready to kill him. I couldn't allow that, so I thought about how much I wanted to hurt him, how much I wanted to kill him and..."

"And what, Harry," Hermione asked shakily.

Harry looked up at her. "He sounded human as he screamed; I've never heard him sound human before, sound like a normal person..." Harry looked away from Hermione. "I should hate him. He's a monster; I know that, but..."

"He's human," Hermione whispered in understanding.

"I felt sick after I'd hurt him, there was an old piece of glass probably a piece of mirror, on the floor in the bathroom, I don't even remember picking it up," Harry said as he showed Hermione his bandaged wrist.

Hermione slowly unwrapped his arm to reveal several deep slash marks, just starting to clot. "Oh, Harry," Hermione whispered as she cringed lightly. "These are deep; we should get you to Madam Pomfrey, if not her, Professor Snape."

Harry shook his head and wrapped the bloodied bandage back around his wrist. "People are going to be arriving to the club soon; I'll go to Severus afterwards."

"Harry, we can reschedule the club meeting. Everyone will understand if you don't want to hold it tonight."

"No, the clubs important, it's not just about extra study and if I'm not here tonight, they're not going to get that," Harry said firmly.

Hermione sighed and relented. "All right, but directly after we're going to Professor Snape. And we should think about adding Healing to our curriculum."

Harry smiled slightly. "That's a good idea; see this is why I need your help."

Hermione smiled back. "Well, how big do you think we should require the room to be?" Hermione asked as she looked around the common room sized room that it was currently.

"At least the size of the Great Hall," Harry said seriously.

“Do you really think that many people will come?” Hermione asked with wide eyes.

“Maybe not tonight, but once word gets around, definitely,” Harry said and then walked towards the door. “Come on, they’ll be starting to arrive by now.”

Harry wasn’t wrong, as soon as they stepped out of the room; they saw the first few students arriving. Harry decided to wait outside until the last of the students arrived so they could all see how the room worked. Harry was surprised at the numbers. The Hall was quickly filling up with students from every house and year, word had spread fast it seemed.

As soon as it looked like that was all of them, Harry spoke up. “Thanks for coming. Give me a moment to open up the room and then we can all get out of the hallway,” Harry said with a chuckle. Everyone but Hermione watched with curiosity as Harry walked past the spot in the wall that the door would appear, three times. Each time thinking about exactly what he would need the room to become. Finally after the third pass, a large door with a gold doorknob appeared before them.

Harry slowly opened the door and stepped into the new room. He was followed quickly afterwards by everyone else who gaped as they walked through the door and quickly got out of the way as not to hold up traffic. Harry himself was looking around in awe. This was more than he had expected. Hogwarts certainly knew what they needed.

There were tables off to one side with an entire area just for potion brewing, little alcoves to sit and study and do homework, bookshelves upon bookshelves of books with every book in the curriculum of Hogwarts and then some. There were places to duel, places to practice Defensive magic, areas to practice Charms and Transfigurations. It was a study hall from heaven. There was even a night sky over their heads for Astronomy.

“Harry, this is more than perfect,” Hermione said from his side and Harry nodded his head in agreement and then noticing a large area

with a podium in front of rows and rows of cushions, Harry figured that was where he was meant to speak from.

“Well,” Harry said as he went to the podium. “I guess take a seat and I’ll tell you all what I have in mind for this study club.” Harry waited while everyone got comfortable and he was glad to see that even Ron had come. He still wished his friend would talk to him, but he wouldn’t push him, he’d come around eventually.

“First off, thank you, Neville, for giving the fifth years the idea to come to me for extra help, which ultimately spurred this whole idea,” Harry said with a chuckle while Neville blushed where he sat next to Dean and Lavender.

“Let me explain this room first, because I’m sure you’re all rather curious where I came across a room the size of the Great Hall. This is the Room of Requirement or as the House Elves call it, The Come and Go Room. Many of you have probably heard rumors about it or even stumbled across it at some point. It can be, as far as I know, anything you want or need it to be. I think it may have out done itself this time,” Harry laughed and others followed suite, still looking around the room with interest and awe.

“Now to The Club; I’ve decided instead of haggling over a name for it, to just call it that, and then if someone overhears you talking about it, mainly the Professors, it’ll appear as if you’re talking about any school club or organization. I think we should keep this a secret for now, not because we’d get in trouble for having The Club, as it is perfectly within the rules to have a student run study club. But because I know the professors pretty well and I want to be able to savor the looks on their faces when all of you start showing such improvement that even Severus Snape will be amazed. Because that is what this club is all about; learning and improving ourselves as Witches and Wizards.”

A hand shot into the air, it was a male Ravenclaw seventh year that Harry had seen around, but didn’t know. Harry nodded. “I get what you’re saying, and it will certainly give us all better test results, but are we only going to be learning what the professors are already teaching us?”



Harry shook his head. "Actually what we learn is up to all of you. I expect we'll improve upon what we struggle with, but this club is also to give us a chance to learn what the school won't teach us, or is lacking in. Hermione Granger suggested just before you all arrived, for us to learn Healing, something that we don't have a class for until NEWT level. I personally think that with a bit of hard work, even a first year can learn how to fix cuts and bruises or even mend a broken nose."

"Will we be learning anything that you've been taught as Professor Snape's apprentice?" Justin Finch-Fletchley asked.

Harry nodded. "Some of the things I've learned, I will keep to myself, as its well into Mastery level and he's asked me to keep it to myself, and it is very difficult, believe me, I struggle with it. But some shortcuts to make brewing easier, defensive spells that are not normally taught, even in Professor Blacks Dueling class, and a few other things here and there, as I think about them, I'll teach anyone who thinks they can do it.

"That brings me to another matter, if you think you can teach a subject, something you are sure you know better than others, don't hesitated to teach it. My goal is to have first and second years doing third and fourth year spells and potions work before the end of the year, and to have everyone have a strong grasp with Defense Against the Dark Arts. I think that is one of the most important things about this club, especially now.

"We may be students, children, and the Professors may be trying to keep us as such, but there is a war in the Wizarding World and it's right on our doorstep. The better we are at defending ourselves and our families, the better off we're going to be. And even if by some miracle this war ends tomorrow, at least we'll all be prepared for what lies ahead of us in our uncertain futures and we'll be the brightest Witches and Wizards of our age."

Applause rocketed the room and Hermione gave Harry a bright smile. Harry blushed, he hadn't intended to make a speech, but there it was. The applause died down and Harry continued onto the more practical aspects of the club, times to meet.

"I know we are all, as individuals, busy with our own projects and clubs and such. I know I and several of you have Quidditch to worry about coming up as well, so I was going to leave it up to you to decide when we should meet during the week. I think that if we're serious about this, it should be more than just once a week."

Cho Chang raised her hand. "I have an idea." Harry nodded for her to go on and smiled at the Witch he had once, a long time ago had a crush on, but was happy that she was still with Cedric Diggory. "I think if we leave the room open for whenever we want to come to it, then we can meet whenever anyone has time. We can have those who want to teach, set up times for that on a signup sheet and that way we can make sure the groups don't get too big or overwhelming. We can treat this room as a general common room, but specifically for learning and study. That way we can leave our own common rooms for fun and relaxation."

"That's a wonderful idea," Hermione exclaimed. "I don't know why the professors haven't thought of making a place like this before. I can't tell you all how many times I've wanted to perfect making a potion, or casting a spell, but have always had to go to the professor to ask to use the space to do so. And of course that in itself can be a pretty daunting task," Hermione said and then blushed at her rant, but many others were nodding in strong agreement.

"So it's settled then? We open the room for any time, schedule small classes, and work around our own schedules while working together for everything else. I can't believe how well this is going to work out," Harry said to himself and everyone chuckled.

Harry looked down at his watch. "Wow, the time certainly has flown, it's nearly curfew. To keep this as low key as possible, from the professors at any rate, may I suggest that we adhere to the school rules and not be caught out of bounds? We should also make sure we're not seen entering or leaving the room, and area in large groups. Professor Snape, Professor Black and, and... and Professor Lupin," Harry said heavily. "All know about the Room of Requirement, so it won't be hard for them to figure out what's going on. I'd like, for my own amusement to keep them in the dark as long as possible. And

believe me, I need some amusement in my life,” Harry said with a sad chuckle. The others laughed half-heartedly as well, many of them looking at Harry with sympathy.

“Well, I’ll post a signup sheet for those of you who have something you’d like to teach and I’ll hang it up tomorrow here in the room. Oh and lets call this the Study Hall, so you’ll all be able to get back in once the door vanishes. All you have to do is walk across the stretch of wall where the door is now, three times, and think about the Study Hall and the door will appear. The room seems to have a great memory once it’s been created so it should always appear, that is unless you suddenly really have the need for a bathroom or a broom closet.” Harry laughed. “I’ll see you all around.”

Harry stepped down from the podium as everyone started to leave in pares or individually. Harry was glad they were all taking the secrecy of the club seriously. Finally it was just Hermione and Harry left. Hermione looked around the hall and then turned back to Harry.

“This is going to be the best thing that has ever happened for Hogwarts and I hope it lasts even after we graduate. How did you come up with all of this anyways, Neville’s study session couldn’t have given you the idea for all of it?” she asked.

“Actually, you gave me the idea,” Harry said and Hermione looked at him odd. Harry threw an arm around her shoulders as they left the room. “You’re always trying to learn something new and trying to perfect what you’ve learned. I thought, wouldn’t it be nice if we all helped each other to do the same. And did you see, no one mentioned house rivalries or anything. I think I even saw a couple Gryffindors and Slytherins sitting next to each other, that’s unprecedented,” Harry chuckled.

Hermione suddenly sighed and her shoulders drooped a bit. “What is it, Hermione?” Harry asked.

“I hate to say this, but I think it’s true. I think your death is what really brought us together as a school,” Hermione said sadly. “You died in front of all of us and suddenly it no longer mattered what house we were in. We were all kids, helpless to do anything but watch and...”

Harry hugged his friend closer as she suddenly broke down. He'd been expecting this sooner. He was frankly amazed she'd lasted this long, he wouldn't have had he been given the chance to let it really sink in after he'd seen her and Ron die. "It's all right, Hermione, I'm here now, and I'm not going anywhere, I promise and I keep my promises," Harry said resolutely, kissing the top of Hermione's head as he held her in his arms tightly.

--

A/N: Sorry it's taken so long. I have no excuses.

## Chapter Thirty-Seven – Coup D'état

Harry, with Hermione's hand clasped tightly in his, hesitated before knocking on Severus' door. The two waited patiently as there was quick movement from the other side and then the door was yanked open.

"Where have you been?" Severus demanded as soon as his eyes fell on him. Harry shrank back a little and looked at Hermione, who squeezed his hand reassuringly.

"Around," Harry said quietly, not looking up at Severus. "Can we come in?"

Severus looked from Hermione to Harry and back and then stood aside. But he placed a hand on Hermione's shoulder, stopping her. "I'm sure Harry is grateful for your support Miss Granger, but we need to talk to him alone," Severus said sternly.

Hermione looked into the sitting room and saw Sirius sitting there. She squeezed Harry's hand again and then let go. He turned back with a panicked look in his eyes after seeing Sirius as well. He didn't want to do this anymore and wished they had just gone to Madam Pomfrey.

"It's going to be all right, Harry. I'll be in the common room when you get back," she said lightly and Harry nodded. She leaned up and kissed him on the cheek. "Don't worry, they'll understand," she whispered and then left the three.

"Harry," Sirius started as he stood while Severus closed the door. "We've been looking for you for the last few hours; you haven't been on the map, where have you been?"

"You found the map?" Harry asked, but when he didn't receive an explanation he turned away. "I told you, around."

"That is not an answer, Harry," Severus stated.

“Well what do you want me to tell you?” Harry suddenly snapped as anger built up inside him. “What do you want me to say? That I rescued Remus? Well I didn’t and he’s probably dead because of my stupid actions!”

“Harry, he’s –”

“No! I don’t want to hear it!” Harry started towards the door, but Severus grabbed his arm. “Aah!” Harry tore his arm from Severus’ grasp and held it against his side as it throbbed in pain.

“Harry, what’s wrong?” Severus asked with concern in his voice.

Harry shook his head and took in a deep breath and then uncovered his arm. The bandage was soaked through, but it was only lightly damp, the bleeding having stopped a while ago. Sirius was by his side in moments.

“What happened?” he asked, gently taking Harry’s arm in his hands.

“I hurt Voldemort,” Harry said tightly.

Sirius and Severus looked at each other with alarm in their eyes and then Severus unwrapped Harry’s arm. He paused when he saw the slash marks and the confusion was evident in his eyes for a moment. “He didn’t do this to you.” It wasn’t a question.

Harry shook his head. “He’s human,” Harry whispered. “He’s human and I hurt him.” Harry swallowed thickly. “I wanted to hurt him. I-I enjoyed it.”

“Harry.”

Harry shook his head and pulled his arm away, wrapping the bloodied bandage back around his wrist. “I’m sorry I couldn’t save him,” Harry whispered after a minute while the two stared at him.

“He’s in the Hospital Wing,” Sirius said.

“What?”

“Remus, he escaped. Whatever you did, it saved his life. It took him a while to get out, but he managed it,” Sirius said gently.

Harry shook his head. “No, after what I did to Voldemort surely they would have...”

“Had they caught him, I’m sure they would have killed him,” Severus said seriously.

“Are you sure it’s really him?” Harry asked with suspicion in his voice.

“It’s how we got the map back; he found it while he was hiding. It is Remus, Harry,” Sirius reassured.

Harry stared at the two. “Good,” he finally whispered and sat down on the couch.

“Harry,” Severus whispered kneeling down in front of him. “Are you all right?”

“I just thought...” Harry shook his head and then gave them a small smile. “I’m fine.”

Severus and Sirius shared a hard glance and then they looked back at Harry.

“It’s after curfew, I should go back to the dorm,” Harry said as he stood.

“Harry, you aren’t going anywhere until I heal your arm, and I think we should talk about this,” Severus said pulling Harry back down.

“Right, sure, let’s talk,” Harry whispered, not really wanting to talk at all.

--

Harry sat in Ancient Runes three weeks later. It was his last class before lunch. They were learning how to lay quick wards without

needing a runic base. These wards were temporary, but more powerful than their charm counterparts. They were working on a privacy ward that acted much like the silencing charm, but it was much harder to break. Harry already knew how to cast this ward; he'd laid a permanent one over Myrtle's bathroom by adding a base rune to it. So he was sitting on the side after showing he could do it, working on a project of his own.

This was something he'd thought about trying to create for a while now, but didn't have the knowledge or time needed to work on it. Now, he had both the time and because of Ancient Runes and Arithmancy he had the knowledge. He didn't know if it was possible, but he thought he'd give it a go anyways.

Harry was so engrossed in his work that he was startled when the end of class was announced and Katie Bell shook his shoulder to get his attention. Harry hurried to packed up his parchment and books and leave the room with his other classmates.

"I wouldn't get so engrossed in whatever you were working on, in Defense this afternoon. Alicia said Snape's on a warpath or something," Katie said as they made their way to lunch.

"Really?" asked Harry, looking over at his Quidditch teammate.

"Yeah, she said she hasn't seen him this mean in class since before your second year. He's being worse than Professor Mordant, she says, and he even took points off Cedric and he's one of his best students next to you. But maybe he'll be better in our class, because you're there an' all," Katie reassured when Harry's eyes widened.

"Yeah, maybe," Harry muttered, trying to figure out what could be up with Severus. He hadn't seen him outside class in the last few days because he'd said he had business and he wasn't going to be around for their extra lessons.

Harry had used the extra time to teach some things to The Club, especially some Potions tricks to help out in Potions as they all needed it with the taskmistress Professor Mordant was. At least she was somewhat fair in her dislike of the students. But she was very



close to how Severus used to be and not even Harry could get along with the woman.

The Club, so far had been going extremely well, but there was one thing Harry hadn't expected and he'd nearly cracked up one afternoon in the Great Hall when he'd noticed. Normally students brought some of their homework, or books with them to meals, especially breakfast and lunch, but since The Club had really started getting popular, people weren't staying as long in the Hall. They came, they ate, and then they left to disappear into the Room of Requirement.

It had been even more amusing, because McGonagall had pointed this out to Dumbledore and the two had the most perplexed look on their faces afterwards. Harry had quickly left the hall himself after that as to not start snickering in front of them. He had however, noticed that the staff were all watching the student population more closely since then. He thought he'd use the mirror in Salazar's Chamber to spy on a staff meeting at some point in the near future and see if this was brought up at all. After all he needed to know if they were catching on yet. The longer they kept The Club a secret, the more amusing it would be when the teachers found out. That and the longer they could go unsupervised and not have the adults telling them that they couldn't learn something just because they were children.

"Harry," Katie said from a little ways down the table as she sat next to Alicia and Angelina. Harry looked up as he sat. "Professor Snape wanted us to work on casting silently for today, but I'm still not getting it. Do you think you could help me work on it some before class?" she asked.

"Sure, why don't we just grab a sandwich and head up to The Club, we've got about an hour before class."

Katie nodded and started pulling together a sandwich. "Thanks, Harry, I think it's a good idea to be on Snape's better side today, just in case."

Harry nodded. "Probably is," Harry said and pulled his own sandwich together.

Hermione sat down and looked at him oddly as he stood up with his food. "Where are you going?" she asked.

"To help Katie with some Defense work, did you still need help with your Arithmancy tonight?" he asked as Katie waited for him.

"Yes, thank you, Harry, the numbers still don't seem to be adding up right and I really want to get this spell correct before class tomorrow," Hermione admitted.

"After Quidditch, I'll meet you at The Club," he said with a smile and then left with Katie, both hiding their food on their way out.

--

"Harry, I don't think I could have gotten this on my own. It seemed so difficult before but you made it so easy," Katie said and then leaned up and kissed him lightly on the cheek. "Thank you for your help."

Harry blushed slightly. "You're welcome, Katie, anytime."

Katie smiled and then looked at her watch. "Oh no, we're going to be late, come on!" she exclaimed and then pulled him down the hall at a run, proving she didn't need a broom to fly.

They skidded into the hall where the Defense classroom was, a few minutes later, just as Severus was closing the door. "You are late," Snape said with a frown on his face.

"Sorry, we lost track of time," Harry said sheepishly, breathing heavily and giving Katie a half smile as he moved to step into the classroom. Severus stepped in his way.

"Be that as it may, you are still late. Did I or did I not state the very first class that if you were going to be late, to not bother coming at all?" Snape said coolly.

Harry looked at Katie and she nodded. "Yes, I suppose, but we're only a couple seconds late," Harry argued.

"And still late, perhaps next time you will consider being here on time like the rest of your classmates. I will see the two of you in detention tonight after dinner for skipping my class," Severus said curtly and then moved to close the door.

Harry put his foot in the door. "You can't be serious? We weren't even that late and we ran to get here!"

"Potter, I am deadly serious, now removed your foot so I can get back to teaching the students who deserve to be taught!"

Harry stumbled back and Severus closed the door firmly in his face. He looked at Katie who was staring at the closed door as stunned as Harry was. "Did I do something wrong?" he asked no one in particular.

"Alicia did say he was in a bad mood," Katie said, bighting her lip. "Come on, we might as well go back to The Club."

Harry nodded and followed in a numb sort of shock. He couldn't think of anything that would set Severus off like that. He'd been much later to class before and it had been shrugged off, even joked about, why would it upset him now?

They entered into the Room of Requirement together, but Harry didn't really realize they were there until Angelina spoke up. "What's wrong with Harry?" she asked, putting her book aside.

"Snape wouldn't let us into class," Katie said and several heads shot up.

"What?!" was the collective response from many of them, including Ron and Hermione, a few couches away.

Hermione got up and rushed over to Harry. "What happened?"

Harry shook his head, anger starting to come to his eyes. "I don't know. We were maybe a half a minute late. He was closing the door when we got there, but he wouldn't let us in."

"He gave us detention tonight for skipping his class," Katie added. "So much for Quidditch practice and studying," she said flopping down on the couch beside Angelina with her arms crossed over her chest.

"I'm not going," Harry stated.

"What?" Hermione asked.

"I'm not going to the detention," Harry said firmly.

"But, Harry..."

"No! It's a completely undeserved detention. He could have let us in and taken a couple points away. We ran to get there on time. It was quite obvious that we wanted to be there. So I'm not going to his detention!" Harry said with finality.

"I don't know if that's such a wise idea, Harry," Hermione said fretfully.

"You have Defense next right?" Hermione nodded. "Let me know how he is in class. If he's gotten over himself by dinner, I'll think about going. Right now I'm too angry to be in the same room as him," Harry hissed and then walked across the room to one of the dueling dummies.

The others watched as he started casting spells at the dummy. "If Harry's not going, I'm not going either," Katie said and the others looked at her in shock. "Harry's right, it was completely undeserved. We practiced most of lunch to get our spell work correct for Snape. And what he said to us..." she shook her head angrily.

"What do you mean?" Hermione asked. "What did he say?"

"Said we didn't deserve to be taught, and just because we were late," she spit and then got up and joined Harry with taking her frustrations

out on the practice dummies, but with considerably less damaging spells.

“At least we know what’s set Harry off,” Ron said softly.

--

Harry paced outside of the defense classroom waiting for Hermione. Normally he would be using this time for homework or helping students in The Club, but he was too agitated to do anything constructive. The door opened and Hermione was the first to storm out, followed quickly by Ron, Seamus, Neville and then Dean. Harry ran to catch up with them as the others spilled out of the class, most looking as equally outraged.

“He took away fifty points for answering a bloody question wrong!” Ron ranted, completely forgetting that he wasn’t talking to Harry.

“It’s like he expects us to be perfect!” Hermione nearly growled. “He gave me a week’s detention for pointing out that half Ron’s question was correct!”

“That is it!” Harry shouted and turned to go confront Severus about his outrageously bad behavior, but Dean, Neville, and Seamus stopped him and pulled him with them along to dinner.

“Don’t bother, Harry, we’re not going to detention anyway,” Neville said. “And who really cares about the points anyways.”

“Wait, you all have detention?” Harry asked, shocked to hear this.

Dean nodded. “All of the Gryffindors do. He thinks we’ve been somehow cheating because we’ve been doing so well on our pop quizzes.”

“He said he expected good work from the Ravenclaws but the fact we all got perfect scores had to be us cheating,” Seamus put in.

Harry frowned at that. "That's bloody bollocks, what is this, guilt before innocents? I'm going to talk to him." Harry was again pulled back.

"No, wait until tomorrow," Hermione said. "Maybe he's just having a bad day and this will all blow over."

Harry relented and followed his friends into the Great Hall, but his resolve not to talk to Severus until the next day wavered considerably when they got there. Harry was receiving glares from many of The Club members. Harry sat down with his friends and wasn't surprised when the first students started to come up to Harry for an explanation.

Cedric sat down next to him, followed by Cho and surprisingly Draco. "Okay, so tell us, what the bloody hell is up with Snape?" Draco asked first.

"So it really isn't just the Gryffindors," Harry said and then shook his head. "I have no idea; he wouldn't let me and Katie into class today and gave us detention for skipping," Harry answered quietly.

"I'm in my right mind to go to Dumbledore," Cedric said seriously. He was Head Boy this year and Harry knew he would as it was part of his duties to look out for the students. "He's taken away so many points today; I'm surprised all of the houses have any left."

"Not to mention completely unfair detentions," Cho added.

"I'm not one to usually complain about the staff, because it's their prerogative how they want to treat us, but he kicked three of us out of class today and gave us all detention on top of that," Draco growled. "And it was completely superfluous; all we were doing was talking, about class work!"

Harry put his head in his hands for a moment and then looked to the staff table. Severus was absent. "I assume he's assigned detention for tonight?" Harry asked.

"Yes, after dinner," Cho said.

"None of these detentions as far I can tell are fair." Harry said serious.  
"Tell everyone not to go to detention tonight."

"Not that I fear Severus Snape, Potter, but I'm not too keen on finding out what he'd do us if we skived off detention," Draco sneered.

"He can't have all of us in detention at once; his classroom's not nearly big enough," Hermione put in.

"Say we all skip detention, he's just going to come looking for us in our common rooms anyways," said Cho.

"If we're not there, he can't find us," Ron said quietly.

Harry smiled slightly. "Tell everyone to go to The Club. Gryffindor has Quidditch, but we'll be up directly after. Let's show Severus that we're not going to just take his new found animosity against the students, and tomorrow I'll talk to him," Harry said reasonably. "And hope he doesn't kill me," Harry chuckled, to show he was only being half-serious.

The others nodded and moved back to their own tables to spread the word quietly. Harry couldn't believe he was forming a coup against Severus Snape, and here he thought they'd all be rebelling against their new Potions professor first.

--

A/N: Cheers to the rebellion!"

## Chapter Thirty-Eight – Not So Much

As it turned out, Harry would be talking to Severus that night after all. Harry and his other teammates had just finished with a very vigorous practice and were heading back to the school and Room of Requirement, when Severus came storming up the path towards them. They all stopped at the rather enraged glare in Severus Snape's eyes, and Katie cowered behind Harry. Even Harry gulped slightly, but then squared his shoulders.

"You two are supposed to be in detention! I suggest you're there before I am!" Severus snarled and then turned to go back to the school.

Harry glanced at his teammates and then gently pushed Katie towards them. He crossed his arms over his chest and glared at Severus' back. "No one's going to be in detention tonight, Professor," Harry said coolly as the others started to move on towards the castle, but they all stopped before they got not ten feet away as Severus swung back around.

"I knew you had something to do with this!" Snape snapped accusingly. "Why can't you leave well enough alone?!" he shouted.

"So I did do something," Harry stated calmly. "Perhaps you can enlighten me on what I did, and we can see the end of this horrible attitude!"

The others gaped at the way Harry had just spoken to their professor. It was clear they expected him to be hexed into oblivion at any moment, at the very least, but Snape just glared at Harry with a defeated look in his eyes.

"Just tell me, Potter, why you did it? Is it so horrid an idea for you to have me as your father?" Severus hissed.

Harry was the one gaping now. "Oh," Harry finally said and looked to his feet.



“Even Black was delighted when I told you I was going to adopt you. You seemed fine with it three weeks ago, so why did you send the letter denying me?” Severus asked with a hard voice.

Harry swallowed. He didn’t know how he was going to explain this. He fully understood Severus’ anger now. Severus had told him he was thinking of adopting him the night Remus came back, it was part of their talk. Harry had been a bit distracted with that whole day’s events so had pretended to be pleased and brushed it aside without revealing what he’d also done that day.

Harry had been spooked by his death more than even he realized, and then with everything happening during the summer, the strength of his connection with Voldemort, and then him hurting the Dark Lord... He wrote a signed letter to his relatives requesting that adoption rights be denied to Severus and Sirius and had them sign it and send it to the ministry. He’d felt horrible after it was done, it was pure selfishness on his part, but he didn’t regret it.

Harry finally looked up. “I’m sorry, but I don’t want to be adopted.” Though he looked Severus in the eyes it wasn’t true, he did want Severus to adopt him. To Harry the man was his father in everything but blood and name, but he needed Severus to be able to kill him when the time came, not if, and he knew he couldn’t do it, wouldn’t do it if he was his son.

Severus frowned. “You’re lying.”

Harry looked away and saw his teammates looking at him. “I’m not,” he stated and turned back towards the pitch.

Severus grabbed his arm, stopping him. “Get out of here,” he growled at the others. “NOW!” he snapped when they hesitated but then they all quickly left, looking over their shoulders at Harry with concern in their eyes. “They’re gone; tell me the truth, Harry,” Severus said firmly.

Harry breathed out heavily. He should have told him, realized himself, a long time ago. It wasn’t really until he’d been reminded of his connection to Voldemort that he started thinking about it. Harry

looked up at Severus. "I forgot," he whispered and then shook his head. "I didn't want to remember..."

Severus looked over the boy with a bit of fear coming to his eyes, the last time Harry had looked so defeated, so reluctant to tell him anything, he'd told him he was one of Voldemort's Horcruxes. "Go on."

Harry's features hardened into resolve. "To destroy the Horcrux that is a part of me, I have to evoke the dark magic at least in part. His soul and a piece of my soul were joined with Slytherin's and Gryffindor's swords. His Horcrux went into Gryffindor's sword and mine into Slytherin's. When Gryffindor's sword was destroyed, it took his Horcrux with it, but Slytherin's sword was never destroyed like Gryffindor's. I still had a Horcrux when I died, allowing me to come back."

Severus stared back at him, still grasping his upper arm, but a little more tightly than before. "You're saying I'm going to have to kill you anyways." It wasn't a question.

Harry stared into Severus' eyes. "Yes."

Severus let go of Harry, as if he'd been burned and backed away. "NO!" he shouted.

"You promised," Harry whispered.

"I will not! Do you understand me, I will not! We will find another way and if we can't, I don't care what the magic does to you –"

"Severus," Harry pleaded softly. "Please, if you truly love me as a father, you will."

Severus shook his head. "No. We will do whatever it takes, but I will NOT kill you!" He shouted and then stormed away, leaving Harry to stare after him.

Harry shook his head and breathed out heavily. He'd thought Severus was the one person he could rely on for this, but he'd pushed the

man too far. He'd underestimated how much he'd come to care for him. He'd have to find another way. He didn't want to die, he really didn't want to die, but he couldn't subject what he'd known he'd become on the world either.

Harry turned away from the school and Severus' retreating figure and then he looked out at the lands around Hogwarts. He could see where he'd died, struck down so quickly by Voldemort. The day was still clear in his mind even though other things had faded and blurred.

Harry looked down at the shards in his hand and remember what the Dark Lord had said about Death wanting them both. His brow furrowed in thought as they gleamed through his skin. He clutched his hand and looked around Hogwarts, bathed in the red iridescent glow of the setting sun. A brief flicker of gold washed over the grounds and Harry's eyes widened slightly as an incredulous idea came to his mind.

"Maybe I won't have to die after all," Harry whispered thoughtfully to himself.

--

The next day came and with it stares and whispered words behind his back, and the worse potions class ever. His Potions class the next afternoon was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. It was horrible, more so. Harry didn't think he'd had a worse Potions class, even with past Snape. Mordant seemed to have taken on Severus' acerbic attitude while Severus had canceled his own classes for the day and seemed to be hiding, which was very un-Snape like.

Severus hadn't been at the staff table at breakfast or lunch and Dumbledore had even apologized to the school about Severus' behavior the day before, letting all of the students off who had been given detention but hadn't shown and had given all the points he'd taken away, back. He'd of course not given a reason why, but news of the argument that had taken place in front of the Gryffindor Quidditch team had spread through The Club like a plague and then of course the rest of the school.

Harry felt awful. He could ignore the stares he received, but his mind wouldn't let go of what he'd done, which was what started his problems in Potions class. Harry thought he'd been doing well, making the potion as he'd done numerous times before, until Professor Mordant came to stand in front of him. He'd taken her criticism before, but had brushed it aside, even when she seemed to make jibes about Severus. Didn't mean he was happy about it though.

This time her jibe at his potion skills made his temper simmer, and then boil over when she degraded Severus for taking him on as an apprentice and said he didn't deserve the consideration he'd given Harry in adopting him. Harry's magic had seeped out of his control and his cauldron had exploded over the women, leaving boils before he'd been able to regain his lost control. He'd promptly been served a week's detention and kicked out of class. Harry had been hiding from everyone since then.

It was during dinner, and he knew he should be heading to his detention shortly, but instead he was sitting down outside Hagrid's deserted hut, deep in thought. That day's loss of control over his magic wasn't the first and he knew it wouldn't be the last. But what he was planning was probably the most foolish thing he'd ever considered doing.

Harry rubbed gingerly at the hidden mark on his left arm. He looked towards the Forbidden Forest, how easy it would be to slip out into the forest and past the wards and let his connection take him directly to Voldemort. Harry closed his eyes and concentrated on their link. He was starting to feel the first twinges to his scar when his attention wavered and his eyes snapped open to see who had broken his concentration.

It was Remus. "Hello, Harry, what are you doing out here?" he asked as he sat down on the stoop next to Harry.

"Avoiding detention," Harry answered with partial honesty.

"Detention, not with Severus, I hope?" Remus asked gently.

Harry shook his head. "I blew up my cauldron on Professor Mordant in class today."

Remus unsuccessfully hid a snort of amusement. "Ah. I'm not so sure it's wise to be skipping her detention, but you're old enough to make your own decisions, I'd wager," Remus chuckled lightly.

Harry shook his head. "Don't like her either?" he asked.

"Understatement, she knows I'm a werewolf and seems to have a fear of them, though I'm pretty sure she's never actually come face to face with one."

"We could always introduce her to Moony," Harry laughed.

"Somehow I doubt that's the way to win her heart," Remus chuckled.

"Eh, it was just a thought," Harry said nonchalantly.

Silence fell between the two and Harry looked back towards the forest again. Remus followed his line of sight. "Waiting for someone?"

Harry looked back at Remus. "What? No, just thinking," Harry answered evasively.

"Harry, Severus told us about..."

Harry stood up abruptly. "Can we not talk about this?"

Remus breathed out heavily. "Why are you so set on dying?"

Harry spun around to look at the werewolf. "I'm not. I don't want to die!"

"Then why make Severus promise to kill you? I understand your fear about the dark current. Hell I fear what you could become, Harry, but you don't have to use it, we can find another way!" Remus spoke heatedly. "There has to be another way."

Harry turned away, looking back out at the forest again. "I have another way," Harry nearly whispered.

"What?" Remus asked, standing up.

Harry turned back. "Nothing, I should go to detention." He started to walk back towards the school.

"Harry, what are you planning?" Remus demanded.

Harry stopped and looked at the ground. He should really tell someone just in case... "I'm going to make a deal with Voldemort. He removes his Horcrux and I'll give him immortality."

"Harry, that's insanity!" Remus nearly shouted.

"And may be the only way I'll be able to live," Harry stated.

"Or he could simply just kill you! Harry, I don't know what has you thinking like this, but..."

"I'm turning evil, Remus!" Harry snarled, cutting the man off.

"Harry, you're not..."

"I hurt my enemy with barely a thought," Harry said seriously. "Next time it could be Severus, Sirius, you... It could be my friends, my family, I can't allow that!" Harry shouted.

"Harry, we'll find another way," Remus said as calmly as his nerves would allow.

Harry shook his head and then pointed his hand at the distant Whomping Willow. The entire tree burst into flames and then exploded in a shower of burning bark and wood, littering the ground with smoldering debris.

Harry clenched his fist and looked at Remus. "I'm not so-much as winded, Remus. I'm too powerful and I haven't even grazed the surface of Hogwarts' magic. Do you really want that turned against

the world?" Harry asked and then walked away, leaving Remus staring shocked at the wreckage that was once the Whomping Willow.

--

A/N: Sorry this has taken so long, I know it's short, but the next chapter will be longer to make up for it.

## Chapter Thirty-Nine – Trouble and Confessions

Halloween, Harry had always hated Halloween. This year was no exception. The last weeks had been very trying for Harry. Severus wasn't avoiding Harry any longer, but he, Remus, and Sirius had become very wary of him. They were watching him like hawks watch their prey, expecting him to disappear to Voldemort's side at any moment. They'd been able to dissuade him from doing so, but as time passed, Harry's resolve to do so only grew stronger. It didn't help that they all wanted to tell Dumbledore; sure that the old man would have some way to help Harry.

Dumbledore was the last person Harry wanted helping him, especially now. With the destruction of the Whomping Willow, Harry and the rest of the school really got to see just why Voldemort was afraid of Dumbledore. At first everyone thought it was somewhat funny, until they saw Dumbledore's reaction. The man was downright enraged over it and had demanded a confession of whoever was responsible. Harry had decided to take a very Slytherin approach to it all and pretended he knew nothing about it, deciding next time he wanted to prove a point, he'd chose a regular tree to blow up. He was just glad Remus was being tight lipped about the whole thing, so far.

"What is that, Potter?" Mordant asked with a sneer as she came to loom over his workspace, bringing Harry out of his thoughts.

Harry looked down at his potion; it looked fine, smelled horrible, but looked fine. "It's the Pepper Up Potion you assigned us, Professor," Harry answered politely. He found it was easier staying on the woman's good side, if there was indeed a good side to her.

"Indeed, then would you care to explain why your potion is a different color than the rest of your classmates'?" asked Mordant, motioning to the class around him.

Harry looked around and frowned. His potion was a different color, not even a shade different, but an entirely different color. But he'd brewed this one with Severus many times for the Hospital Wing and he'd done it exactly as he'd always done and he'd done it perfectly.



He knew it was correct. Harry shrugged. "They missed a step?" he said a bit cheekily.

"No, Potter they did not, you apparently have been making up your own instructions," Mordant sneered. "I would think as a Potions Apprentice you would be able to make these potions perfectly. Apparently your master lacks the skills necessary actually to teach you how to brew a decent potion."

Harry nearly growled at the insult to both him and Severus, but calmed himself to reason with the women. "I've done this potion dozens of times. Severus must have –" Harry started to explain, but was cut off for his efforts.

"Are you referring to a Professor by their first name, Potter? Twenty points from Gryffindor for your impertinence," Mordant snapped.

Harry's jaw dropped and then clenched. "I'm his apprentice, and have been given permission to use his first name, Professor. And I'll have you know that I've done this potion correctly," Harry seethed. By now the class was not even feigning working on their potions and were blatantly staring at him, waiting to see exactly what he was going to blow up this time, it had become one of their favorite pass-times.

"I think that will be another twenty points for talking back to a teacher, Potter," Mordant said snidely and Harry heard the other Gryffindors groan quietly.

Harry balled his hands into fists. It had been quite a while since anyone had treated him like this and he was quickly losing his cool. He took a deep breath and released it to calm himself. "Yes, Professor," Harry ground out and went back to working on his potion.

"And I think, starting over will teach you to follow directions, as you've obviously not been taught that either." Mordant lifted her wand to wipe Harry's cauldron clean but Harry, on instinct, lifted his hand and a shield formed around his cauldron, causing her spell to bounce off and hit the ceiling with a loud bang that sent dust down from the rafters.

Harry was as shocked by his actions as the Professor was, but while she was seething, Harry was examining his deep green shield with astonishment in his eyes. He'd never been able to make a shield wandlessly before. The rest of the class was now gaping as Harry poked at his very solid shield.

"What on earth?" Mordant hissed, dusting herself off. "Fifty points from Gryffindor; removed that shield immediately, Potter!" she ordered. "No wonder the ministry wants someone watching over you," she muttered softly, but Harry had heard quite clearly.

"What?" Harry looked up at her quickly, a slight gold glow coming to his eyes. "You know what," Harry hissed, leaning closer to his Professor. "I'm sick of taking orders from a mediocre, unimaginative, ministry bigot who cares nothing about teaching us and everything about furthering her own career! I'll have you know, that Severus Snape is ten times the Potions Master than you will ever be! He's made potions that you would never dirty your dainty hands with and I don't care what hostility you may have for him, but taking it out on me is childish and immature!" Harry seethed; he was now practically towering over the witch. "And if you're going to insult me, you might want to make sure that the insult has some truth to back it up!"

Mordant pointed her wand at Harry's chest. "Back off, Potter." Harry took a step back and looked at the wand in the witch's hand. "Get out of my classroom and report to the Headmaster's office," Mordant commanded. "Now."

Harry stared at the women. "Fine, I'll go to the Headmaster's office. I'm sure he'd just love to hear that a teacher was insulting her student in class. In fact, perhaps he'd like to hear how unfair you've treated all of us over the last couple months. Many have wanted to complain after all."

Harry didn't bother dropping the shield around his cauldron, not that he was sure he could. He grabbed his bag from the floor and turned to storm out of the classroom. "Stupid ministry," he muttered under his breath. "I'm surprised Voldemort hasn't taken it over yet."

"It seems Umbridge was correct about you. You are unstable and a liability to us all," Mordant said as soon as she'd heard his words.

Harry stopped and spun around. "Excuse me? Umbridge tried to kill me and got arrested for it; if anyone is unstable it is her!" Harry very nearly shouted.

"Leave my classroom, Potter, before I have you expelled for your obvious support of the Dark Lord."

Harry glared at the Professor for a moment as the class stared in shock at the accusation. Harry didn't bother denying such a ridiculous statement and swept out of the classroom. He debated not going to Dumbledore's office, but he figured the Witch was probably fire calling up to him at that very moment. And he wanted to give Dumbledore an earful about his choice in staffing.

Harry took a breath when he saw Dumbledore waiting for him outside the gargoyles when he finally rounded the corner. He looked none too happy. "Sir, I would appreciate you listening to my side of the story."

Dumbledore frowned, but then motioned for Harry to follow him up to his office. Harry sighed and followed. Dumbledore sat behind his desk, but Harry remained standing with his arms crossed over his chest.

"Sir, with all due respect, Mordant has been horrible to me since the first day of class, she's been horrible to everyone in fact," Harry said.

"Harry, sit down, please. Your actions in Professor Mordant's class aside, I have something to discuss with you," Dumbledore said as he pointedly looked at Harry and then Harry's seat.

"What?" Harry asked.

"It's about the Whomping Willow."

Harry took a step back towards the door. "Sir, if we're not going to discuss Professor Mordant's behavior, I have other more productive things to do, like homework," Harry said lamely, cursing his own

words as he moved to leave the room, but stopped at the headmaster's next question.

"When did you unblock your adult magic?" Harry slowly turned back to look at Dumbledore.

He nervously mustered all of his will to look Dumbledore in the eyes. "I haven't," he said evenly.

Dumbledore stared back at Harry. "I'm not as blind to the goings on in this school as you and Severus seem to think I am. You and Severus spent hours in the Room of Requirement readjusting your magic at the beginning of last year, did you not?"

Harry breathed out. "Yes, we did, but..."

"Harry sit," Dumbledore commanded and Harry did as he was told for once. "I am sick to death of your lies. I've given you chance after chance to tell me the truth, and yet all I get is lies. I am going to give you one chance to tell me the truth or I am going to be forced to take more drastic actions."

Harry looked up at Dumbledore and then down to his hands. "All right."

"Why did you blow up my Whomping Willow?"

"Proving a point to Remus," Harry muttered honestly.

"Good, he said as much when I questioned him."

Harry looked up at Dumbledore, panic growing in his eyes. "He told you!"

"Harry, I can see the majority of the grounds from up here. I saw you blow up the tree," Dumbledore said bluntly. "I thought I'd give you some time to confess."

"Oh," Harry whispered with a bit of relief.

“Everything,” Dumbledore added and Harry’s relief vanished. “Obviously you had no intention of doing so,” Dumbledore said crisply. “Though he denied knowing anything about your increase in magical ability, I could tell he was lying. I could also see that he was doing it to protect you. What I want to know is why you have my staff continuously lying to me?”

“Continuously?” asked Harry. How many questions had the man been asking, and for how long? Why hadn’t anyone said anything?

“Yes, continuously, Harry.”

“W-well, what have they been lying to you about?” Harry asked cautiously.

“Anything concerning you,” Dumbledore answered bluntly. “When did you unblock your magic?”

“I haven’t...” Dumbledore glared hard at Harry. “Okay I have.”

“When?” asked Dumbledore.

Harry looked at the door and then back at Dumbledore. “Professor, please...”

“Who are you?” Dumbledore asked stonily and Harry stood up and pulled his wand out. Dumbledore’s eyes turned hard as ice as he also stood up and moved towards his own wand.

“I’m sorry, Professor, really I am.” Harry moved quickly before Dumbledore could raise his wand. “Obliviate!”

Harry stared for a moment and then breathed out heavily and sat down as Dumbledore stared blankly at the wall behind him. He put his head in his hands, gave a small nervous laugh and then looked back up at Dumbledore, still standing there, staring blankly; he couldn’t believe he’d just Obliviated Albus Dumbledore.

“Bloody Hell,” Harry muttered. He quickly stood back up, picked up his bag and walked towards the door. “Forget everything from just

before Professor Mordant fire called you today,” Harry ordered with a slight waver in his voice and then left the office, closing the door behind him.

Harry leaned on the door and then looked up to the portrait. “By order of Hogwarts, I wasn’t here,” Harry said firmly.

“Of course,” the man in the portrait said. “If the Protector says he wasn’t here, he wasn’t here.”

“Good,” Harry breathed out, he licked his suddenly dry lips and swallowed thickly as a sudden bout of nausea came over him. He closed his eyes and took in another deep breath. “Has he come to yet?” he asked quietly.

“Yes, he’s baffled because his tea’s gone cold.”

“Right, the tea, should have thought of that,” Harry muttered and then walked down the stairs. “Why does my life have to be so damn complicated? Severus is going to kill me when he figures out what I did.”

--

Harry hated Halloween; he reiterated his earlier thoughts as he sat down beside Hermione at the Gryffindor table for the Halloween feast. He glanced up at Dumbledore nervously, but the old man was acting none the wiser about their earlier conversation. He decided because he couldn’t remove the fact that Dumbledore had seen him blow up the Willow, that before the feast was over, he was going to confess to the old man. He hoped that if he came clean in front of the school, and lied that he didn’t know how he did it, perhaps the Headmaster wouldn’t draw the same conclusions as earlier. But he was pretty sure his punishment would be Quidditch, or rather, no Quidditch, it was the logical choice after all, the one thing he truly enjoyed.

“Harry, are you all right?” Hermione suddenly asked when she noticed him look guiltily around him for the fourth time. Several others looked over at Harry as well, most of them, the Gryffindor Quidditch team.

“Umm,” Harry leaned forward and motioned for the others to do the same. “I thought I should tell you,” Harry whispered. “Because I’m fairly certain of my punishment; it was me, who blew up the Whomping Willow, I’m going to come clean tonight.”

“Harry! You could be expelled for this!” Hermione actually managed to screech quietly.

“Why come clean, Harry?” Ron asked, looking just as outraged as Hermione, but for obviously different reasons, he’d just been made official Keeper after the sixth year they’d assigned got injured the week before during practice and decided the game was too dangerous. It was too bad, he was really good.

“First rule in the pranksters guide book, you don’t come clean, unless you’re caught outright,” George stated.

“You haven’t been caught outright, have you, Harry?” Fred asked.

Harry looked back and forth between the two. “I have it on good authority that he saw me do it and has just been waiting for me to confess on my own,” Harry said heavily.

Katie, Angelina, and Alicia put their heads in their hands. “He’s going to ban you from Quidditch!” the three girls wailed quietly, leaning on each other’s shoulders.

Harry dropped his head to the table. “Probably,” he groaned.

Katie patted him on the shoulder. “Well, we all figured you’d done it anyways, you’re the only one powerful and foolish enough to blow up a tree the size of the Whomping Willow.” Harry looked up at her with his mouth hanging open. “Best come clean before he makes the speech again about the one responsible coming forward.”

Harry nodded dejectedly. “I’m so sorry,” he told the others. “I’m just glad we decided to train reserve players.”

"We all are," Ginny said. "Don't worry, Harry, I'll do your position good."

"Hey, I'm not off the team yet," Harry complained and the others chuckled, albeit a bit morosely.

Harry looked back up to the Head Table and saw that Dumbledore was about to get up and give his before dinner notices speech. Harry stood up and with his eyes staring down at the floor, reluctantly walked towards him. Everyone's eyes followed him of course. He stopped just before the rise where the Head table sat and took in a deep breath.

"It was me," Harry stated and then looked up at Dumbledore.

"What was you, Harry?" Dumbledore asked, standing from his seat.

"I blew up the Whomping Willow," Harry said firmly and gasps and small snickers flew through the Hall.

"I was beginning to wonder when you were going to confess," Dumbledore said, staring over his half-moon glasses at him.

"I'm really sorry, I should have said something earlier, but your reaction scared me into silence," Harry rambled. "I'm pretty sure it was self preservation kicking in."

"Indeed; and why did you blow up my Whomping Willow," Dumbledore asked.

"Actually, it was complete accident, I was proving a point to Professor Lupin and my point was bigger than I thought," Harry said, half truthfully, looking pointedly at Remus. "I'm ready to accept my punishment, whatever it may be," Harry said looking to his feet, feeling a bit sick to his stomach.

"Hmm," Dumbledore hummed after a moment. "I think extra lessons with Professor Snape, to control your growing magic that has obviously grown out of control without us realizing it." Harry's brow furrowed and he mouthed 'extra lessons' to himself. "And of course



seeing as you already have so much going on, I think giving up something to give you time for these nightly lessons would be a wise idea.”

Harry closed his eyes. Just like Dumbledore to have him to be the one to decide what to give up. “Right, of course,” Harry said and then looked up. “I guess the only thing I’ve got to give up is – is Quidditch.”

There were a bunch of whimpers and groans at the Gryffindor table, but the fact that no one shouted outright against it confirmed that the team had quietly spread the word while he was on his way up to the Head Table.

“Well that is too bad,” Dumbledore said with false lament for him. McGonagall was glaring daggers at him, Harry shrank back a bit.

“Yes, well sacrifices do have to be made for the greater-good,” Harry said, though he meant that for more than just this situation. He looked at Severus pointedly and then turned to go back to the Gryffindor table.

“Harry, do join me for tea tomorrow afternoon during your free period,” Dumbledore said cordially.

Harry halted and then nodded. “All right,” he said and then quickly retreated. He sat down amongst his friends. “I hate Halloween,” he moaned and dropped his head onto the table with a loud cluck.

--

The next afternoon after his Defense class, Harry looked up to the portrait above Dumbledore’s door before he knocked lightly. The door opened and Harry hesitated before he stepped inside. Remus and Sirius were there.

“Hello,” Harry greeted uncertainly and then looked at Dumbledore. “I didn’t realize you had company, I can come back later.”

“No, that’s alright, Harry, I invited them here,” Dumbledore said affably.

"I really am sorry, Sir," Harry said as he took a seat beside Sirius. He was apologizing for many things in that one statement, not that Dumbledore knew half of what he was apologizing for.

"Forget the Willow. I am disappointed you waited so long to come to me, but giving up Quidditch as your punishment, I hadn't expected you'd be so harsh on yourself."

"W-what, but I thought that's what you wanted me to give up," Harry said dejectedly.

"I did, but I hadn't expected you to give it up willingly, I thought I was going to have to strongly suggest it. At least this way I'm not having a bunch of Gryffindors complaining to me, as it was your decision." Harry sagged back into his seat sullenly. "Have some tea, Harry; it'll make you feel better."

"I thought that was what the lemon drops were for," Harry muttered as he took the teacup offered to him. "What did you want to discuss with me?" he asked holding the cup in his hands, not really inclined to drink it.

"Your magic seems to be a bit out of control, as you demonstrated on the Whomping Willow. I don't think I've ever seen even a grown man blow up a none magical tree like you did the Willow. I certainly couldn't do it and I'm quite powerful in my own right. I don't even think I could do it with a wand," he said thoughtfully.

"It was accidental magic," Harry said with a shrug and looked between Remus and Sirius who were both staring intently at him. "I've done more crazy things with it before," he said looking back at Dumbledore. "I Apparated onto my school gym once when I was in grade school and I released a Brazilian Boa Constrictor on my cousin at the zoo, just before I got my Hogwarts letter. Blowing up trees seems rather nothing compared to that," Harry rambled with a chuckle and then looked back at Remus and Sirius, they were acting awfully odd, as if they were trying to tell him something without actually telling him anything. Harry raised an eyebrow at them, but his attention was diverted back to Dumbledore as the man spoke again.

"Perhaps, but Whomping Willows are magical trees. They don't generally catch fire easily nor blow up," Dumbledore said taking a sip of his tea.

Harry absently followed suit as he stared back at the man. But as he brought the cup to his lips, he stopped when he saw the other three Wizards watching him fixedly. Unnerved, Harry slowly lowered the cup. Why were they looking at him like that? Harry looked into his teacup; it didn't appear there was anything in it but tea. That was when understanding dawned on him and his breath caught in his throat. That was why Sirius and Remus were there. There was Veritaserum in his tea. Sirius was technically his magical guardian and probably gave Dumbledore consent.

Harry shakily put his cup on Dumbledore's desk. "On second thought, I'm not really thirsty anymore," Harry mumbled. "What was it you were saying, Sir?" Harry asked after clearing his throat, though it still came out rather tightly.

Dumbledore looked at Sirius and Sirius sighed. "Harry, drink your tea."

"No thank you, Sirius," Harry said quietly but firmly.

Remus and Sirius frowned at one another. "Harry, I would very much appreciate it if you drank your tea," Dumbledore said directly.

"Why?" Harry asked, trying not to show the panic or the anger welling up in him.

"Harry, please drink your tea," Sirius said again, not looking at Harry. "This will be so much easier."

Harry stood up from his seat. "No, I will not drink that tea and unless someone wants to tell me what this is all about, I'm going back to my common room, where I have friends waiting!" Harry started to walk towards the door.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Potter, but I cannot allow you to do that." Harry slowly turned back around at Dumbledore's words. Dumbledore had his wand trained on him. "Please, retake your seat." Harry swallowed hard and then walked over and sat back down. "Drink the tea, Harry."

Harry looked up at the Headmaster anger flashing in his eyes. "No, I don't like my tea laced with Veritaserum, thank you very much," Harry said and then looked to Sirius. "And I don't particularly like godfathers who give consent for their underage godson to be submitted to it either." Sirius sighed but didn't look at Harry. "Just ask me what you want to know."

Dumbledore stared intently at Harry for a moment before he spoke in a controlled voice. "When and why did you unblock your magic? How long have you been practicing the Dark Arts? And does Severus know all of this already as well?"

Harry stared back at Dumbledore, debating on telling the old man anything, or everything. He had a strong desire to run away, but he forced himself to remain seated and decided he was going to give him as much of the truth as he could without revealing that he was from the future or the Protector of Hogwarts. "In answer to your last question, yes," Harry said quietly. "I'd prefer Severus to be here before I answer any other questions, as it concerns him as well."

Dumbledore frowned before he rose from his seat and headed for the fireplace. He threw in a pinch of Floo Powder and said, "Defense classroom," before he stuck his head in the flames. "Severus, please come to my office."

"Albus, I am in the middle of class," came Snape's irritated answer and Harry smirked slightly.

"Dismiss it and come to my office now," Dumbledore ordered sternly before he pulled his head out of the fireplace.

"Harry, I didn't want to do this, but tell him everything, please," Sirius whispered into Harry's ear. "He knows quite a bit more than we thought he did and he thinks you Obliviated him yesterday."

Harry stared at Sirius with wide eyes. "Please tell us you didn't, Harry," Remus whispered before Dumbledore came to sit back in his seat.

Harry looked guiltily at the two and then gave a slight nod of his head. He looked away from the two when Remus rubbed at his temple and Sirius let out a heavy sigh and looked at his fisted hands.

It wasn't long before the resounding silence that settled over the headmaster's office was broken by Severus forcefully pushing open the door. "Albus, I don't see why this couldn't have waited –"

"Sit down, Severus," Dumbledore said just as sternly as he had ordered the man to his office. Severus sat down next to Harry and gave him a questioning glare.

"They tried to give me tea laced with Veritaserum," Harry said in answer. Severus looked angrily at Dumbledore and then Sirius and Remus. "Professor Dumbledore wants me to answer a few questions and I thought you should be here as one of them is going to give away a certain secret. He wants to know when and why I unblocked my magic."

Severus nodded in understanding, going a little pale. "Indeed."

Harry looked back to Dumbledore. "During the summer before second year I left my relatives house early as you are aware. I found a book in Flourish and Blott's, a potions book that had a potion to unblock my magic. I decided that if the Dark Lord was going to return, then I had to be prepared. I was at the apothecary getting the ingredients when I ran into Severus, who saw immediately what I had intended to do. He did try and stop me, but as he had no authority over me outside of school, there wasn't much he could do. So instead of letting me try and brew the potion on my own, knowing that it was far above my skills, he said he'd help me..."

"In exchange," Severus cut in resolutely. "When he had his magic unblocked, he'd unblock mine as well." Dumbledore's eyes flashed in anger toward Severus. Severus stared back and continued before he could be interrupted. "He proved to be very intelligent and figured out

why I had a block in the first place. This was when I gave him a Wizards Oath that I would not return to the Dark Lord, he demanded it in fact.”

“Severus helped me brew the potion and I unblocked my magic. You remember how I said I woke up with the Dark Mark. I was knocked unconscious after unblocking my magic, which was rather painful, and when I woke up I had the Dark Mark on my arm. Neither Professor Snape or myself knows how it got there,” Harry explained, his eyes never leaving Dumbledore’s. It was all truth after all.

“I assume, Severus, that you are the one who’s been teaching him the Dark Arts?” Dumbledore asked tightly.

Severus looked at Harry questioningly. “Dark Arts, besides Occlumency and Legilimency, no,” he answered. “Harry doesn’t dwell in the Dark Arts without need,” he said again looking at Harry.

“Then who has been teaching you the Dark Arts, Harry?” Dumbledore asked severely.

“No one, as Severus said I don’t dwell in the Dark Arts without need,” Harry answered, but he looked passed Dumbledore when he said this. Remus, Sirius and Severus frowned at his obvious lie.

Dumbledore stared at Harry as if trying to decide whether or not to believe him. Finally Dumbledore spoke, his voice resigned. “Harry, I have no control over what you do outside of school. It was a very unwise decision for you to unblock your magic, just as it was very unwise to search out a very dangerous Dark Arts book, but you have done nothing illegal according to the Ministry laws. You have hurt no one but yourself, and all I can say is I am very disappointed in you.” Harry nodded, looking at his hands in relief, though it probably looked like shame to the others.

Dumbledore then turned to look at Snape. “Severus, however, I made a deal with the ministry. You would have your magic blocked for fifteen years, the shortening or lengthening of which was to be left up to my discretion. In exchange you would not go to Azkaban. By going behind my back and having Harry unblock your magic, you have not

only violated my trust in you, but have also put me in a very difficult position. I feel that you have earned the right to have your magic unblocked, therefore I will not be telling the ministry about this. However, you did willingly and knowingly put a student in danger by helping Mr. Potter brew that potion. I am sorry, but I can no longer allow you to teach at this school.”

Harry jumped up from his seat. “What! No!” he shouted.

“Harry, please sit down,” Severus said, acceptance in his voice, as he rose.

“No! You can’t kick him out of Hogwarts! He has nowhere else to go! There’s nowhere safe for him!” Harry said adamantly. “The Dark Lord wants him dead as much as me; the safest place for him is here!” Dumbledore didn’t seem to be moved at all by Harry’s words. Harry looked to Sirius and Remus for help, but they just shook their heads and shrugged as there was nothing they could do. “Sirius, Remus, please, Professor.” Harry turned back to Dumbledore. “This is my fault, I agreed to it!”

“I’m sorry; Harry, but my hands are tied. Severus was well aware of the consequences when he helped you make that potion. The potion could have gone terribly wrong and you could have died, or lost your mind —”

“It was my idea; I knew what could have happened! If anything Professor Snape saved my life, again, by helping me. You can’t fire him!” Harry argued.

“I have made up my mind, Harry,” Dumbledore told him sternly. “Severus, you have until this evening to pack your things.” Snape glanced at Harry and then nodded to the headmaster before he made his way to the door.

Harry glared at the Headmaster, coming to a decision he’d never thought he’d make. “Fine, but I’m still his apprentice, if he goes, I go!”

Severus sighed. “Harry, you are not leaving school,” he said quietly.

Harry ignored him. "I am," Harry said firmly. Severus just shook his head and left the office.

"You are still a minor, Harry, you can't make that choice," Sirius said quietly. "I am your godfather, your magical guardian, and I am telling you that you are staying here."

"Make me!" Harry spat, as he again made his way to the door.

"Harry, where are you going?" Sirius asked exasperated.

"As I said, make me, if you can. If Severus is leaving this evening, I have things to pack and friends to say goodbye to," Harry said with anger in his voice before he too swept out of the office, not giving the three wizards a chance to argue or drag him back.

Harry quickly made his way down to the Chamber of Secrets. He'd be bringing Mort with him and as many books as he could fit from the library in Salazar's Chamber. He hadn't ever thought of leaving Hogwarts, but if Severus was going, he was going too.

--

A/N: What you think, want more?



## Chapter Forty – Change of Plans

Harry ran down into the Chamber of Secrets, but stopped before he reached Salazar's Chamber. He took in a deep breath and realized what he was about to do. He was about to leave Hogwarts for good. Pushing the fact that he'd be putting his existence yet again in danger by leaving; he would be forfeiting his rights as Protector and leaving the school vulnerable. Could he do that?

Harry plopped down onto the floor and breathed out heavily. With a frustrated growl, he put his head in his hands. "What am I going to do?" he asked himself.

He was glad Remus, Sirius and Severus had talked him out of his crazy thoughts of making a deal with Voldemort, but did he really have any other choice? Harry put his hand to the stone floor and concentrating lightly, felt the currents of magic that flowed through the school. The dark current pulsed with anticipation and Harry felt his fingers tingle at the sensation.

Harry quickly drew his hand back and with that motion made his resolute decision. "Mort," Harry called as he stood up.

Mortedolv came sliding out of one of the tunnels not too long after Harry had shouted his name. "Harry, what is wrong?"

Harry took in a deep breath. "I'm leaving Hogwarts."

"When?" asked Mortedolv.

"Today, as soon as I'm packed."

"For how long?" Mortedolv asked with a very serious tone.

Harry looked at his feet. "I don't know. I may never be coming back. I want you to go with me," Harry said looking back up.

"My place is here at Hogwarts, young heir." Harry nodded and turned to open the lower chambers. "You, however, need me more."

Harry stopped and looked back. He smiled slightly. "Thanks, Mort. I'll have to shrink you though."

Mortedolv tilted his head as if he were shrugging and proceeded Harry into the Chamber.

"No one man should have so much power," Harry whispered to himself after Mortedolv had gone.

He stopped before he could follow Mortedolv as he felt like someone was watching him. Harry looked up to the effigy of Salazar. It stood over him, looking down with ancient stone eyes. Harry for the first time realized how Severus and Remus must feel every time they saw the statue. It wasn't only the basilisk hidden behind it, it was the figure itself. It was rather unnerving the way it stared down at him, as if judging him.

Harry shook his head. He'd always felt a strange connection with Slytherin and it wasn't only because he'd nearly been sorted into his house. There was so much mystery surrounding Slytherin, especially for Harry, who had learned much about him through his reading, but not everything, not nearly enough. The man was painted as a villain in history, but a scholar worthy of Ravenclaw in his own writings. And he was one of the founders of Hogwarts, which to Harry made his infamous past seem... wrong.

That was one thing that Harry had always wondered about. Slytherin left Hogwarts, but why? Was he chased away? Did he leave of his own accord? The history books had many theories, most of them, him turning his back on the school, but in all his reading in the Founder's Library, he never come across that answer.

Harry wondered if the man had been faced with the choice Harry was making now. "What would you do?" he asked the statue quietly.

"He would do what need be done," a voice came from behind Harry and Harry spun around, quickly drawing his wand.

"Put that away you silly boy, it is useless against me."

Harry's eyes widened as he lowered his wand, he was staring at a ghost dressed in fine medieval clothing. He'd never seen this ghost before, and he'd thought he'd met all of them the night he'd died. "Who are you?" Harry asked.

"His brother," the ghost stated pointing up to the statue. "He killed me, you know. I am certain I deserved it to."

"Why?" Harry couldn't help but ask.

The ghost looked up at Harry and smiled not unkindly. "I killed his eldest son." Harry blinked at the ghost, trying to decide if that was a good thing or not. "I had this ambition, this notion that Muggles were going to take over the world and destroy us Wizards. I was not entirely wrong. It has nearly happened several times in the last thousand years, but we have proved to be very resilient."

Harry stared at the ghost. "So you killed your nephew to make a point?" Harry asked, very confused about this entire conversation.

"No, I killed him because he took my notion and slaughtered it. You see, he thought the best way to solve the problem was to destroy them first before they had the chance to destroy us. I killed him for his crimes against Muggles and Wizards alike and my dear brother, out of ignorance, killed me for revenge. He hated himself once he'd learned all of the facts, of course, but it couldn't bring me back."

"So it was his son, not him, that all of the stories in the history books are written about," Harry said, finally understanding.

"Yes, you see history, even a thousand years ago, has always been written by the victors, or in Salazar's case, the survivors. He chose, instead of having his son go down as a tyrant, to take his place in history. He gave up his good name to protect his heir and eventually died for it."

"Why are you telling me all of this?" Harry asked the ghost.

He smiled crookedly. "Ivan was not swayed by magic or lineage to do the things he did. He did it because of the notions I set into his mind,

notions that have been in Wizarding history books for more than a thousand years. Ivan was the first Protector of Hogwarts.”

“Are you trying to tell me that the Protectors have always been dark?” Harry asked, his face turning a bit pale.

“No, the Protectors are neither Dark nor Light. It’s their actions and beliefs that make them either, not magic or lineage. My actions and beliefs set fear into peoples’ minds through my notions, into Ivan’s mind, into Tom Riddle’s. It has tainted the true purpose of the Protectors of Hogwarts for a thousand years and created monsters out of men, who would have been great.

“I made history with my mistakes and Salazar changed history to save his son, perhaps the only way he could. I think it is time my heir brought out the truth and erased my foolish notions from the history books, and show the world the true purpose of the Protectors.”

“Your heir?” asked Harry.

“You, Harry, are my heir. I had a son of my own and when the Slytherin name fell out of favor, he chose to take another name, Potter. He grew into a man, and married Gryffindor’s daughter and started the noble line of the Lords Potter.” Harry stared at the ghost with his mouth hanging open. The ghost of his ancestor chuckled. “I bet you were wondering why that little elf Dobby called you Lord, weren’t you? Elves are remarkable creatures, can see things others cannot.”

“You’ve been following me around all this time!” Harry suddenly exclaimed, as he suddenly realized that Dobby had only called him Lord once, and that was when he was in Diagon Alley before second year.

“Well someone had to keep an eye on you, though I hadn’t expected my heir to figure out how to time travel and find a way to take the place of himself.”

Harry shrugged and gave a sheepish smile. “It’s a family curse; we Potter’s always seem to figure out how to achieve the impossible.”

The ghost laughed. "It's a Slytherin Curse, believe me. This school would not be here today if Salazar had not united the Wizarding people of Britain with the notion of Hogwarts." He looked up at the effigy of Salazar. "He had better notions than I."

Harry looked up at Salazar's statue as well. "I don't know what will happen to me if I tap into the currents," Harry said quietly. "Will I turn into Ivan, into Tom? Will I be worse? It is better I leave Hogwarts," Harry whispered.

The ghost of Salazar's brother stared hard at Harry for a moment. "You will not leave Hogwarts," he stated with an almost glacial tone. "Salazar ran away, you will not."

"You've been following me all this time; you've seen what this school is doing to me. If I fully immerse myself into the currents to remove Voldemort's Horcrux..."

"Your beliefs are different from theirs, Harry, but I will tell you, the magic of Hogwarts has grown in the thousand years since the school was built. You are right to assume that you may not be able to handle it, but as for turning dark, you won't. However you were correct in your statement. No man, no matter how powerful already, is meant to have so much power. It could burn you out and leave you with no magic at all or simply kill you."

Harry looked to the floor as he thought about that, another problem in his mess of a life. "What is worse, helping your enemy achieve the one thing he's always wanted, or dying?"

"Dying is not so bad, yes I would love to be with my family, but I chose to stay behind and watch over my heirs. You'll have the choice this time as well, I'd imagine."

"What about living without magic?"

"I am a ghost. I've been without magic for a thousand years and barely remember it."

“What’s your name?” Harry asked after a moment of weighing his options in his mind.

The ghost chuckled. “Forgive me, Abiah Slytherin, at your service,” he said with a flourishing bow.

--

Harry was not surprised to see Dumbledore in the Entrance Hall with Sirius and Remus as he looked down into it from four floors above. Harry clutched in his hands, Slytherin’s Sword and the Sorting Hat, which he’d just stolen from Dumbledore’s office. He could have avoided the Entrance Hall all together by using passageways, but he wanted to see Remus and his Godfather one last time, just in case he’d never see them again.

He wasn’t leaving Hogwarts. Abiah, for a ghost, was pretty persistent and had turned Mortedolv against him. Having a fully-grown Basilisk taking sides on an issue, is a huge incentive in making up one’s mind. Removing Voldemort’s Horcrux, however, was wholly Harry’s decision. He wanted to go down and say good-bye, but he couldn’t. He only wished that the last words he had said to them hadn’t been in anger.

“Harry, what are you doing?” Hermione asked from behind him and then gasped when she saw what Harry was carrying. “Harry, what are doing?” she exclaimed.

Harry spun around. “Hermione, umm, I umm...” He couldn’t come up with anything.

“He is removing Tom Riddle from his soul,” Abiah said nonchalantly from behind Hermione, who spun around and then gaped at the ghost.

“Y-you’re not one of the Hogwarts ghosts! Wait a minute!” She spun back on Harry. “What does he mean removing Tom Riddle from your soul?”

“Well, she is a cleaver one. I had hoped my appearance would have shocked her into forgetting that remark,” Abiah said as Harry glared at the ghost of his ancestor.

Hermione glared at the ghost herself and then looked back at Harry intently, waiting for an answer. Harry looked back at his friend, trying to figure on something to say. He looked back down into the Entrance Hall and saw Severus. Dumbledore, Sirius and Remus turned to him as he approached.

“Where’s Harry,” Sirius asked.

Hermione leaned over Harry’s shoulder. “Why are they looking for you?” she asked when Snape shook his head and answered that he thought Harry was with them still.

Harry bit the inside of his lip and then came to a decision. “Come with me,” he said quietly and started off down the hall.

Hermione hesitated a moment, looking down into the Entrance Hall again, and then quickly followed Harry. Harry led her down the hall, down the passageway to the second floor and then into Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom. “Harry, what are we doing in Myrtle’s bathroom?” she asked, looking over her shoulder at the ghost who had followed them.

Myrtle poked her head from one of the toilets curiously. She looked at Harry and then Hermione, and then Abiah. “Abiah, you’re visible!” she exclaimed. “Nicholas will be relieved you finally decided to show yourself.”

“He was planning on leaving Hogwarts, what other choice did I have,” Abiah said with a shrug and Myrtle nodded in understanding.

Hermione looked back and forth between the two ghosts and then glared at Harry. “What does he mean you were planning on leaving Hogwarts?” she nearly shouted.

“Hermione, give me a moment, and then I’ll explain... everything,” he said heavily and then turned to the hidden entrance into the Chamber.

Hermione opened her mouth to argue, but choked on her words when Harry hissed 'open' in Parseltongue and the Chamber slid open in its typical fashion. Harry motioned to the hidden stairs as Hermione gaped at him, and started down into the Chamber, not waiting to see if his friend followed as he knew she would.

It was once they got down to the bottom of the stairs that Hermione finally spoke. "How long have you been a Parselmouth?" she asked.

"All my life, though I didn't know that was what I was speaking until I was twelve. It sounds like English to me," Harry explained, stepping around the Basilisk skin as he'd done hundreds of times before. Hermione latched onto his arm as they made their way past in.

"Was that a snake skin?" she asked shakily.

"A Basilisk skin, actually," Abiah informed her and Harry rolled his eyes and swallowed a laugh when Hermione clung to his arm tighter as she stared back at the skin with wide horrified eyes.

"W-where are we going?" she asked when they arrived at the true entrance into the Chamber.

"Open," Harry hissed and the snakes slid around the door and then it swung open. "Hermione Granger, welcome to the Chamber of Secrets."

"Bloody hell," Hermione swore, as she took in the chamber before them as it lit up gloriously.

Harry chuckled. "You haven't seen anything yet. Come on, I have someone I'd like you to meet, and try not to scream, it hurts both our ears."

Hermione looked at him oddly, but followed him into the chamber. "Is that Salazar Slytherin?" she asked as she took in the effigy.

"Yes," Harry said and then hissed open the entrance to Salazar's Chamber. "Mort, I've got Hermione with me, try not to scare her," Harry called into the chamber before leading an astounded Hermione



down into it. "Try not to scream," Harry reminded again as Mortedolv came out of the shadows.

Hermione jumped behind Harry so fast, he could have sworn she'd Apparated. "Oh my God!" she whispered. "Its, its..." she stuttered.

"I know, Hermione, he's a Basilisk and his name's Mortedolv," Harry said. "Don't worry, he won't hurt us, he's a friend."

"Y-you talk to him?" she asked, still staring wide eyed at the serpent.

"Yes, he has a very... interesting sense of humor. Mort, this is Hermione, I'm going to tell her everything," Harry hissed seriously.

"If you think that is wise," Mortedolv said calmly. "She looks as if she might faint," he pointed out.

Harry looked at his friend; she did look a bit pale. Harry took her arm. "Umm, Hermione, let's go sit down," he said and then led her into the Library. Hermione's color instantly returned, as Harry knew it would. "Hermione," Harry distracted her from running over to the nearest bookshelf. "This is the Founder's Library and yes you will have free run of it, but first we need to talk," he said seriously.

Hermione nodded. "Yes, yes we do. How did you find this place, when?"

"Sit down, please, and let me start at the beginning," Harry told her and sat down in one of the armchairs. Hermione slowly took the one across from him.

"You're about to tell me something that's going to change the way I perceive you, aren't you?" Hermione asked slowly.

Harry nodded and took in a deep breath. "I'm from the future," Harry decided to start with and waited for Hermione to interrupt, but when she just waited for more, he continued. "At the end of our first year, after I told you to go back for help and I continued on, I found Professor Quirrell standing in front of the Mirror of Erised, trying to find a way to get to the Philosopher's Stone hidden within, for

Voldemort. He tied me up; I didn't even have a chance or thought to fight back, because I was still reeling at the thought that all along it had been Quirrell and not Severus. I really did know nothing about magic all the way back then, and I was so naïve, all of us were. We all would have seen through Quirrell had we stopped to think about it for two seconds instead of automatically assuming it was Severus just because we disliked him.

"But I'm getting away from myself," Harry chuckled; Hermione remained silent; listening intently. "Quirrell had me look in the mirror after Voldemort's instruction. I looked and the stone appeared in my pocket. The enchantment on the mirror was rather simple. If one wanted the stone, but not to use it, then the stone would be theirs. Voldemort, of course, knew right away that I had the stone and commanded Quirrell to get it from me. But when Quirrell grabbed me, it caused him pain, burnt him. I took advantage of this and threw myself at him. I killed him and it killed me."

Hermione stared at Harry with her mouth open. "Y-you died in first year?"

Harry nodded. "I did, but I'm not technically me," Harry held up his hand, when Hermione opened her mouth to question that statement. "As I said, I'm from the future; a really bad future. I died at the end of first year in this time line, your timeline, but in mine, Dumbledore arrived just in time to pull me off Quirrell and save me before I could give all of my magic killing him. From then on, our timelines differ. I was stupid. I didn't care to learn. Year after year, Voldemort tried to kill me in some form, with the exception of third year. Every time I faced him, I grew a little older, a little stronger, but all I ever wanted to be was normal, and I tried to achieve that by ignoring that a mad man was after me. I suppose I just wanted to be a kid, have a childhood..." Harry whispered the last, almost longingly.

"Understandable," Hermione said quietly with a sad look in her eyes.

Harry smiled a bit at her sympathy and continued. "Fourth year I was entered into the Tournament, just as I was last year. Only then I went in blindly. I didn't have Severus to help me; we weren't even on civil speaking terms. I didn't even have Remus or Sirius as neither of them

could come to the school. You were the only one helping me through all of fourth year. At the last task, Cedric and I got to the cup together and decided to take it together. The cup was a Portkey, but not to the beginning of the maze. It took us to a graveyard in Little Hangleton. Cedric was killed right off, he didn't have a chance. I fought Voldemort, face to face for the first time that night. We dueled, and through some sort of miracle I managed to escape with my life and Cedric's body...

"Fifth year was horrible, all year I felt like the world was working against me. No one but a handful of people believed Voldemort was back. With your suggestion we started a Defense group in secret. The school was being taken over by the ministry and Dumbledore was sacked," Harry said quickly when Hermione open her mouth to obviously ask why they'd have to start the group in secret. Harry was amazed his friend was taking this so well, so far. "All year we knew that Voldemort was after some sort of weapon, but the adults wouldn't tell us anything specific. At the end of the year I had a vision that Voldemort had kidnapped Sirius to lure me to the Department of Mysteries. I didn't stop to think that perhaps it was false; and you, Ron, Ginny, Neville, Luna, and I, all snuck out of Hogwarts on a rescue mission that was an utter failure. Voldemort never had Sirius; he wanted me to get a Prophecy for him, one concerning me and him. Death Eaters were waiting for us and we all got separated while running from them. Everyone got injured that night and Sirius... Sirius died when he and the Order came to rescue us."

Harry stopped there for a moment, caught up in memories. Hermione surprised Harry out of his memories as she stood and then sat down across his lap, hugging him tightly. "You don't have to continue, I get the picture," she whispered.

Harry shook his head. "No, I have to."

"You don't have to put yourself through this, Harry, I understand."

"No, you don't," Harry said heavily and then hugged Hermione back and then pulled back and put his hands on her shoulders. "But you have to understand; you have to know."

Hermione stared at Harry with a look in her eyes that was obviously debating whether or not she wanted to hear more, but then she nodded. "All right, go on," she said, staying where she was.

Harry breathed out heavily and hugged Hermione's waist. "After Sirius was killed by Bellatrix Lestrange, she fled and I ran after her. Voldemort arrived and then Dumbledore. They dueled; I was forced to stay out of the duel. Voldemort disappeared and I thought, maybe he had fled, but then he reappeared, he was in my head trying to possess me, trying to get Dumbledore to kill me by killing us both. I was in so much pain I remember wishing Dumbledore would do it. But he didn't and then I remembered Sirius and you and Ron, and Voldemort was forced to release me. He retreated when the Aurors finally arrived.

"Later that night Dumbledore told me the Prophecy in full. It simply stated that I was the only one able to kill Voldemort, at least while I was alive. It seemed it was me or him. I was terrified and though I had all these people around me, supporting me, I felt more alone than ever." Harry stopped for a moment looking around the dimly lit library. To the glass book case that held the Horcruxes Harry had managed to obtain. "During sixth year Dumbledore decided to give me Voldemort's past. I didn't really understand the importance of it all, I thought he should be training me to kill; instead he was giving me Tom Riddle the man, not Lord Voldemort the monster that I knew. I was so confused until he revealed why I needed this information. Voldemort had created six Horcruxes and hidden them."

Hermione gapped at Harry. "H-Horcruxes, t-that's... S-six of them?" she finally managed to squeak through her shock. Harry wasn't surprised she knew of them. It was hard to find references on them, but not impossible and Hermione had spent much time in the Restricted Section of the library.

Harry nodded. "Dumbledore was murdered that year and left me with the task. He'd destroyed one and I'd destroyed one. It was my task to find the others, including a sixth that was unknown to us. I returned to Hogwarts just after school let out. I was there looking for Dumbledore's killer, but I found something else entirely. I found out I was a Protector of Hogwarts."

Hermione stared into Harry's eyes and then she gave a small gasp. "That's how you managed to Apparate out of Hogwarts at Christmas last year!"

Harry nodded a small smile coming to his lips. "Noticed that did you? Must have been driving you mad."

Hermione nodded vigorously. "You have no idea!" she chuckled.

"Honestly, it surprised me, waking up in Hogsmeade and all. I didn't know I could Apparate through the wards like that. Haven't been able to since; I think it's at the school's will," Harry said with a shrug. "Anyways, after I found out I was protector, we, you, Ron, and I, went in search for the Horcruxes and managed to find all but the last. We'd thought we'd found the last. We had spent days tracking it down, but it was a trap. All our information was fed to us. The moment we'd arrived on Privet Drive, we were ambushed." Harry paused and looked away from Hermione. "I was captured by Voldemort and tortured everyday for two weeks until what was left of the Order rescued me," Harry said heavily.

"There's something you're not tell me," Hermione said and turned Harry's head back to look at her.

Harry bit his lip and then decided to tell her everything; she needed to know, as much as he didn't want her to. "I was dueling Voldemort, and losing horribly. He'd grabbed me and made me look just as Ron was hit by the Killing Curse. And then they captured you..."

"They killed me?" Hermione asked quietly, her face going a bit pale.

Harry nodded and buried his face in his best friend's shoulder. "They didn't let you die like Ron, fighting. They executed you, making me watch. After you died, I gave up. I couldn't take your death," Harry said shakily and Hermione hugged him tightly. "Voldemort once asked me what it would take to break me," he whispered. "He didn't know it, but it was your death that broke me, long before he'd ever started the torture. After that, all I thought about was dying. I just

wanted it to end and then I found out what the last Horcrux was. We'd had it all along..."

"What was it?" Hermione asked when Harry didn't continue.

He looked up at her. "Me, Hermione, the last Horcrux was – is me."

"Oh my god, Harry, how?" asked Hermione shakily.

"It was an accident on Voldemort's part. It happened when he tried to kill me when I was one. When I found out, I used Hogwarts' magic to remove it. But I had to sacrifice a part of myself to do it. I tapped into the full magic of Hogwarts and put the Horcrux into Gryffindor's sword and a piece of my soul into Slytherin's. I was dazed a bit afterwards. Ginny had come with me and she and I had just destroyed the last of the Horcruxes, other than the one that was part of me. We were going to destroy the last when we were surrounded by Death Eaters. We fought, but there were too many of them and I was still weak. They put me under the Imperious Curse, several Imperious Curses and forced me to kill Ginny..."

"I snapped my wand after that. Gryffindor's Sword, was destroyed by Voldemort, he didn't even know he was destroying a piece of his own soul. I thought Slytherin's sword was destroyed as well. Finally members of the Order arrived with quite a number of Aurors. Voldemort was weakened with the last of his Horcruxes gone, and fled. Five days later, Voldemort returned to Hogwarts with all of his Death Eaters. Quite a few of us were staying there, after a spy had managed to give up our location at Grimmauld Place. I was recovering still and was told to stay in the school, but when he called me out off the school, I went. I watched people die around me as they fought to keep me safe.

"I don't think anyone expected me to leave the school in my condition. It had been the look of acceptance in your eyes as you died that gave me my acceptance. Both sides stopped fighting when they saw me confront Voldemort. I remember a hush falling over the Hogwarts grounds. All I had for a weapon was my family's sword, nothing extraordinary. I thought maybe I might win, Voldemort was mortal now, but then Voldemort drew Slytherin's sword. I was determined to

end it though, and I did, but not before he ran me through with my own Horcrux. By some miracle I managed to kill him before I died, slicing through Slytherin's sword when I swung mine at him."

Hermione blinked at him for a moment and then her eyes widened. "Your Horcrux wasn't destroyed though was it?"

Harry shook his head. "I'm not quite sure how I found myself in the past. I was a ghost, and at first I wasn't sure where I was, but then I saw a boy lying on the stone floor and realized it was my eleven-year-old self and I saw the Mirror of Erised and realized where I was. I waited, but Dumbledore never came. Quirrell was dead, lying not far from my body and in my hand was the Philosopher's Stone, but it was shattered, as was the mirror. I reached out my hand and touched the stone, my hand went through it and through my younger self's hand, and then I was waking up in the Hospital Wing in my eleven-year-old body."

"Oh my God, Harry, Professor Dumbledore never came, because Ron was just waking up when I returned to the chess board. He insisted on coming with me and it took me a moment to convince him to stay where he was. When I finally made it out of the chamber, I ended up running into Professor Snape before I could find Professor McGonagall. He didn't believe me at first but then when I started telling him about the challenges he must have realized I was telling the truth and finally we came to get you," Hermione explain. "He's the one who brought you to the Hospital Wing."

"What? But Dumbledore said he'd taken me from the chamber. You remember, you were there, when he told me he'd arrived just in time to pull me off Quirrell. I knew that was a lie, because he obviously didn't, but I still assumed he'd been the one to get me."

Hermione shook her head. "No I distinctly remember Professor Snape carrying you to the Hospital Wing. Ron was grumbling because he was being levitated behind us, because he'd twisted his ankle." Hermione frowned for a moment. "Why would Professor Dumbledore lie to you in front of us? I admit that I was a bit distraught at the time, but..."

Harry stared at Hermione. "He lied to you, because he thought he'd Obliviated you. He must have Obliviated Severus too, but why?"

"Huh? But if he'd Obliviated me, Harry, I wouldn't remember Professor Snape..."

"That's because you're immune to Memory Charms," Harry said casually.

Hermione stared at Harry oddly. "Umm, okay, how do you know that?"

Harry blushed. "Ron kind of tried to Obliviate us." Harry said.

"Why?" Hermione asked, looking taken aback.

"We were fooling around just after I found out I was Protector of Hogwarts and Ron walked in." Harry muttered, all in one breath.

"What was that?"

"When I kissed you at Grimmauld Place this summer, it wasn't the first time I'd kissed you... well it was the first time I'd kissed you..."

"Wait a minute, when you say fooling around, you meant fooling around!" Hermione said with wide eyes and then she started laughing. "I'm sorry; I just can't believe we were together."

"We weren't, that's why Ron tried to Obliviate us. You and he were sort of together at the time and we were looking up some things in the library in Grimmauld Place and we kind of, fell into each other. It was totally spur of the moment. Ron thought if he wiped our memories he wouldn't have to realize that the two of you really weren't meant for each other. But it didn't work."

"Oh, but how come it didn't work on you?" Hermione asked after she got over the shock that she and Ron were dating.

"Apparently a very small percentage of all humans are immune to Memory Charms. We just happened to be in that small percentage."



But because of that, for whatever reason, we're fairly good at them," Harry explained.

"So Professor Dumbledore Obliviated Professor Snape, but why?" asked Hermione after a moment.

"I'd like to know that myself," Harry said with a furrow of his brow.

"Who else knows about this? You being from the future, I mean, and being a Protector."

"Severus knows, he found out before second year. Remus found out last year, and Remus and Severus told Sirius the night I died and came back to life. Other than those three, Fleur, Cedric, and Viktor know that I'm a Protector as I had to use Hogwarts' magic during the second task when Death Eaters attacked us. Oh, and I think somehow Ollivander might know, but I'm not sure how much, he's an odd one he is."

"You told me because you couldn't Obliviate me, did you?" Hermione said, without any accusation in her voice.

"That and I had fully expected you to figure it out by now."

Hermione laughed. "I was going on the assumption you were a low level seer, actually. Had I ever thought about the Protectors, I'd probably have noticed that too." Harry shook his head, he was sure she would have. "So how many Horcruxes do you have?" she asked suddenly.

Harry pointed to the glass bookcase. "I have Tom Riddle's diary, Rowena Ravenclaws Bracelet, and me. There is still Slytherin's ring, Hufflepuff's Chalice, Nagini, Voldemort's pet snake, and Voldemort himself. Dumbledore, before he died, thought one was a locket that Slytherin had once owned. But it turned out that it had already been destroyed had been removed and replaced with a fake Horcrux from the cave we'd gone to find it in. It wasn't until after Dumbledore died that I realized it was a false one. We spent days looking for a locket that I had remembered seeing in Grimmauld place. When we found it, we started looking elsewhere for other Horcruxes, as the only magic

on the locket was a strong locking charm. Inside was a similar note from Regulus Black, stating why he'd destroyed the Horcrux to Voldemort, should he ever find the real one."

"V-Voldemort has the others, doesn't he?"

"Yeah, he does, I'm sure of it. Voldemort isn't of this time either. He followed me into the past; it's why he's so determined to kill me. I think he's afraid I'll kill him again. I definitely know he's afraid of Death." Harry said heavily.

Hermione looked at Slytherin's Sword and the sorting hat perched on the hilt of it where it lay against the wall, where Harry had left it. Harry followed her gaze. "You were going to remove his Horcrux when I found you, weren't you?" she asked, looking back at him.

"Yes." Harry nodded.

"Then I'll stay here while you do. You said you were dazed and weakened last time. I can help you afterwards," Hermione said determinedly when Harry looked back at her.

"Hermione, you can't," Harry stated as he stood and set Hermione on her feet.

"Why not... you're scared of something, what?" she asked, looking up into his eyes.

"There's a really old current of magic in Hogwarts, a dark current. There's a lot of magic in it and it's been growing since the founding of the school. It is the school. It's enticing and addictive and I have to tap into it to remove Tom's Horcrux. One of three things could happen when I do. I could become really powerful, and Voldemort's soul will be removed from mine. The magic can be too much for me and burn me out and I could become a Squib or die. Or I could let the magic manipulate me and turn me into something worse than Voldemort. I don't want you to be here if the last two happen."

"I'm staying," Hermione stated and Harry let out a heavy sigh. He knew she was going to say that.

--

A/N: Sorry it's been so long, hadn't intended it to, but college and life got in the way. Here's a really long chapter to make up for it.

## Chapter Forty-One – A Deal With Death

Harry stared at Dumbledore and Dumbledore stared intently back at Harry.

Harry and Hermione had talked for over a couple hours about Harry's past and his future. It was during dinner, but none of them was there tonight, instead, they were all in Dumbledore's office again. It was as if Hermione had taken it upon herself to make sure Harry had a future and her first step was getting Dumbledore to let Severus stay.

Hermione really was a remarkable Witch, she pointed out reasonably that Harry needed Severus even more than he realized. He was the first person Harry had confided in. Sure, he was forced to at the time, but a secret as big as Harry's, had to be shared, or as Hermione had told him, he'd go mad, and Harry agreed completely.

Hermione, however, was not on the side of Remus, Sirius, and to a small extent, Severus, when it came to the issue of telling Dumbledore everything. She saw Professor Dumbledore just as Harry did. It hadn't taken much to convince her that Harry had to be a fully trained, adult wizard before he dropped his past on Albus Dumbledore. She was however, a bit appalled when she learned that he'd Obliviated the Headmaster. She understood why, but felt Harry was throwing fuel on the precarious fire that settled between the two of them and was afraid that one day it was going to explode in his face. She was probably right, but Harry had set that thought aside for now.

"It wasn't Severus' fault," Harry said calmly. "He shouldn't be penalized for my actions when I was twelve. If you are going to punish anyone, you should punish me. I took advantage of his desire to have his magic unblocked, more than he took advantage of my age. He didn't put me in danger, I put myself in danger and if Severus' isn't allowed to stay, then I'll go. My relatives will be all too happy to enroll me in a different school," Harry finished firmly.

Hermione stood off to the side with Sirius, Remus, and Severus. She was fidgeting ever so slightly, but Harry ignored her as he continued

to stare down Dumbledore. The Headmaster continued to stare intently at Harry for a moment longer before he finally sighed.

“Very well, you are old enough to make your own decisions. We will miss you, Harry,” Dumbledore said solemnly.

Harry’s jaw almost dropped. He was letting him go, just like that, with no fight at all?

“Professor, you can’t be serious!” Hermione exclaimed.

“Miss Granger, I honestly don’t know why you are here, this is none of your concern —”

“None of my concern!” screeched Hermione. “He’s my best friend. I’m the one who convinced him to come back up here and speak with you; he was just going to leave!”

Harry was rather surprised at Hermione’s outburst, but he had just put quite a bit onto the girl’s shoulders. “It’s all right, Hermione,” he said quietly, consolingly.

“No it’s not! If I’ve ever come to learn anything by being your friend, Harry, it’s that you are a lot wiser than most people give you credit for. If you felt that unblocking your magic was the best option at the time, then Professor Dumbledore has no right to question it. And as for you,” Hermione turned on Dumbledore, completely ignoring that she was shouting at the Headmaster. “Harry has this affinity in knowing people very well. He may not have completely realized it at the time, but he obviously trusted Professor Snape, or he wouldn’t have had him help him. Harry could have brewed the potion on his own, possibly killing himself in the process, but he was smart enough to know that if he could get the professor’s help, then he’d be a whole lot better off. Harry knew what Professor Snape had been; he wasn’t making any decisions lightly!”

“I’m not questioning Harry’s judgment, Miss Granger. I’m questioning Severus’,” Dumbledore said firmly and Hermione clamped her mouth shut and stayed silent, obviously out of an argument for that, as she looked awkwardly at her feet.

Harry on the other hand did. "You have no right to question his judgment," Harry stated quietly, with a bit of venom in his voice as everyone turned to look at him. "You Obliviated him, Ron, and Hermione, and if I hadn't been unconscious at the time, I'm sure you would have Obliviated me."

"What?" Remus, Severus, and Sirius all exclaimed at the same time.

"When?" demanded Severus.

"At the end of first year," Hermione said quietly, but firmly, as she looked back up at the Headmaster.

Dumbledore stared hard at Harry, ignoring everyone else entirely. "And how did you come to that conclusion, Harry?"

"At the end of first year, you stated that you had rescued me just in time to pull Quirrell off me, but we both know that was a lie, because I killed Quirrell before you got there. I let that slide, because I believed you when you said that you had hoped that I wouldn't remember. I figured you had arrived not too long later. But then Hermione pointed out that you were never there. She'd run to find Professor McGonagall when I told her to, but ran into Severus instead. After convincing him that she wasn't lying, he came directly down to the chamber, and he was the one who carried me to the Hospital Wing." Harry looked over at Snape. "But, Severus, you don't remember that, do you?"

"I do not," Severus said, glaring at Dumbledore.

"Well this is entirely unexpected," Dumbledore said quietly as he stood from his seat and paced a couple times, looking far older all of a sudden. He looked to his phoenix and then back at Harry. "I apologize, Harry. I didn't want to lay this burden on you then, and I don't want to lay it on you now. Know that I was only protecting you."

"I don't understand, from what?" Harry asked unraveled a bit at that statement. Was there yet another thing he didn't know?

"You know the legend of the Protectors from class?" Harry simply nodded, narrowing his eyes a bit. "The magic you used to stop Quirrell wasn't your mother's protection. It was Hogwarts, protecting her Protector," Dumbledore said heavily.

Harry blinked at the old man and then sat down in the nearest chair. And then he laughed. He couldn't help it. "You knew?" Harry managed to force out and then soon stopped laughing, realizing that the humor had gone out of the situation with the look in Dumbledore's eyes. Apparently, he didn't see the humor in it.

Dumbledore sat down in his own seat and ran his hand over his face. "You knew," he said with a sigh.

"Yeah, I found out quite a while ago. I've been trying to hide it ever since," Harry answered honestly and then he cringed slightly. "I feel I should apologize now myself," Harry said after a moment where everyone was looking between Dumbledore and Harry. Dumbledore looked up at Harry questioningly and Harry half smiled sheepishly. "I kind of, sort of Obliviated you yesterday, because I thought you were going to find out that I was the Protector. I feared you'd lock me up because of another stupid title, or I would have told you. You didn't see the look on your face, it honestly scared me."

Dumbledore continued to stare at Harry. "I suddenly understand everything. I assume by your lack of response, that the four of you knew about this?" Dumbledore asked Sirius, Remus, Severus, and Hermione, who were all still standing off to one side of Dumbledore's office. The four nodded. "Is there anyone else, I should know about?" he asked Harry heavily.

"Cedric, Fleur, and Viktor know. I used Hogwarts magic last year during the second task when we were attacked by the Death Eaters. I – I killed them," Harry said regretfully, still unnerved by his actions back then. He could have trapped them, but he hadn't.

Dumbledore only nodded grimly but otherwise remained silent. Harry was grateful for that. He didn't want any wise platitudes about doing what was needed to be done in an extremely hostile situation, to protect those he cared for.

--

Harry sat in the Room of Requirement next to Neville and Ginny. He held his breath and silently counted to ten, he got to eight before Cedric across from him spoke up.

"So, Harry, how'd you do it?" Cedric was of course speaking about Dumbledore's decision to keep Severus at the school after he'd clearly fired him. Harry and Hermione had just gotten done telling them all of the day's events, omitting several key facts of course.

Harry shrugged. "I told him the truth... and Hermione yelled at him, it was brilliant," he said, smiling at Hermione.

Hermione blushed when several heads turned her way. "He had it coming," she said evenly and the others just blinked at her incredulously. Harry snorted and she rolled her eyes at him.

Harry and Hermione had essentially been hiding in the room of requirement from Snape, Sirius, and Remus since they'd left Dumbledore's office. They'd been there for almost an hour when several members of The Club had come in and demanded to know what was going on. Apparently, the staff had been acting very odd today, and Harry's absence since Defense class hadn't gone unnoticed either.

"So you were really going to just leave?" Ron ask from where he was leaning against a bookshelf. "Without telling anyone," he said accusingly.

"Honestly, Ronald," Hermione huffed. "He was only going to leave as a last resort to get Dumbledore to let Professor Snape stay. Did you even listen to Harry when he said that? He loves Hogwarts, he wouldn't just leave it."

"I don't know, he didn't seem to have a problem leaving last year," Ron said scathingly.



"He died, Ronald!" Hermione yelled, her voice cracking slightly through her emotions. "Seriously, you have really got to get over yourself. You are being more stubborn than Dumbledore!" she said heatedly, and then got up from the couch and left the Room.

Harry looked up at Ron through his fringe. "One of these days, Ron, I will die for good, but today is not that day and I am going to try my hardest to make it many, many years from now. I'd rather have you as my friend during that time. Right now, you're bordering on my enemy. Don't be my enemy Ron," he said severely and got up to follow Hermione, ignoring the other's reprimands towards Ron.

Harry found her just outside the door. "We should tell him," she whispered.

Harry shook his head. "It hurts me to say it, Hermione, but I don't think I can trust Ron with this yet. He's too likely to run to Dumbledore." Harry suddenly laughed ironically. "There was once a time when he was the last person I would expect to run to Dumbledore."

Hermione smiled slightly and then hugged Harry firmly. "Maybe one day, he'll be that person again," she whispered.

"I hope so; I miss him as my friend."

Hermione hugged him more tightly. "When are you going to remove Tom's Horcrux," she asked quietly.

Harry stilled a moment as he thought about that and then he breathed out heavily. "Tonight, after everyone's gone to bed. The sooner I do this the better."

"I think at least Severus should be there, Harry, just in case something happens."

Harry nodded. "I agree."

--

Hermione, with Severus, Sirius, and Remus all watched as the power dissipated around them and then Harry staggered to his feet as Slytherin and Gryffindor's swords fell to the stone floor with a clatter. Hermione wasn't the only one to have the urge to run to him, but Mort's massive form was in front of them, preventing them from going anywhere near Harry.

Hermione had been scared to death when chains had shot out of the floor and bound Harry and then he had started screaming. Severus had held her back when she had tried to run to him. Harry had told them he would be in pain, but she had not expected such a retched sound to come from her best friend.

"Harry," she whispered as he continued to stand where he was, looking blankly at the other end of the chamber. "Mort, please, let me go to him," she plead shakily, not knowing if the Basilisk could understand her. She was surprised when the serpent moved aside, but she swept her surprise away as she ran to Harry. The three professors right behind her.

Harry turned around abruptly and Hermione stopped not a yard in front of him as Remus abruptly grabbed her arm and pulled her back. Harry stared at her for a moment, as if trying to recognize her. There was a ring of gold in his eyes and Hermione didn't dare move an inch closer. Finally, Harry blinked and the gold disappeared. "Hermione," he breathed out and began to fall to his knees.

"Harry!" Hermione gasped and dropped down with him as she half caught him. "Are you all right?" she asked shakily as Severus knelt down beside them.

Harry took in a deep breath and looked at the swords lying on either side of him. "I think so. I feel... odd, though."

"Odd?" Sirius asked worriedly.

"Powerful," Harry whispered. "But something..." Harry shook his head and chuckled slightly. "I'm really tired."

"You look exhausted, maybe you should rest," Remus suggested and Hermione nodded in agreement.

Harry nodded too. "Yeah, perhaps," Harry agreed vaguely and then turned to hiss to Mort.

Hermione watched as the Basilisk stared at Harry intently for a moment and then hissed back, nodding his head once.

"That's really creepy," Hermione said and then chuckled when Severus, Sirius, and Remus all nodded with similar expressions on their faces. "What did you say to him?" she asked Harry.

"I told him, that I'm going to rest in the chamber. I asked him to show you all out," he said quietly.

Hermione opened her mouth to protest, but was cut off. "What? Absolutely not, if you are staying here, one of us is staying with you!" Severus said firmly.

Harry only shook his head tiredly and started to walk towards the chamber opening. Hermione stayed where she was as the others made to follow, but Mortdolv moved into their way, making it abundantly clear that he wouldn't allow them to.

Hermione could clearly see that Harry wanted to be alone as she walked towards him unhindered. She bit her lip lightly and then spoke up and Harry stopped and turned to listen. "Stay here and rest. I'll see you at breakfast," she promised and then kissed him lightly on the cheek. "And you might want to get cleaned up a bit. You're filthy," she said, scrunching up her face slightly.

Harry chuckled tiredly and then ran a hand down the side of her face gently. "I'll see you in the morning," he whispered fondly and then looked at the others, who all looked at them with raised eyebrows. "I'll see all of you in the morning. I just need some time alone."

Severus, Remus and Sirius, all nodded reluctantly and started to follow Mort, who seemed to be waiting for them patiently. Hermione followed and was blushing by the time she got to the first door and

looked back at her slightly dazed and shirtless friend, as he looked up at the effigy of Salazar Slytherin. She raked her eyes over him, ignoring the blood that stained his lightly tanned skin, and blushed even more as she took in how fit he was. Hermione chuckled to herself, shook her head, and left the chamber. When had she started looking at Harry Potter as if he were a piece of delicious chocolate cake?

--

As soon as Hermione and the others were gone, Harry collapsed again to his knees. "I don't feel so good, Abiah," Harry hissed.

"Your magic?" the ghost asked with concern in his voice as he appeared before Harry.

"I don't know. I feel powerful, but there's something else..." Harry put his head in his hands and breathed in deeply and then out. "Maybe it's because I split my soul, but I don't remember feeling this way last time."

"Perhaps you are simply tired my heir," Abiah suggested.

Harry nodded. "Remus is correct, I should rest." He staggered back to his feet and then leapt back when a shadowy hooded figure appeared before them.

"Oh dear Merlin!" yelled Abiah as he floated away from the figure as far as he could go without leaving the Chamber.

"You have escaped me again, young Heir of Slytherin," a hollow voice came from the figure.

Harry took another step back. "Death," he whispered with a bit of fear in his voice.

"You have escaped me, but you and Tom will not escape me forever. The war between you will end and I will have you both! However, your oath protects you from me, if you should die first. Therefore, I will help you defeat Tom Riddle."

Harry couldn't believe what he was hearing. "My oath?" he asked shakily and then he remembered what he swore he'd do at the final battle. He'd sworn he would defeat Voldemort. "My oath still exists?"

"Oaths cannot be broken by death or time, Harry Potter," Death said, taking a step towards Harry. Harry took a shaky step back and then another as Death continued to move towards him. "I will help you retrieve Tom's Horcruxes and then when he is dead, you will surrender yourself freely to me."

Harry stopped. "I don't want to die," he whispered fearfully.

"Death is inevitable, Harry Potter. Everyone has to die."

Harry stared at the shadowed image of Death and then he nodded shakily, reluctantly. "All right, all right when Tom is dead, I will give myself to you," he breathed out heavily. Harry stiffened as Death slowly ran his hand down the side of his face and Harry felt the odd feeling leave him and a feeling of lightness take its place.

"Then your death is prevented for a while longer, Harry Potter," Death said quietly and disappeared.

Harry sank back down to his knees. He'd just made a deal with Death. Harry shakily touched the side of his cheek and knew within that instant that the odd feeling that had left him was Death trying to claim him, but prevented from doing so by his oath. He had been dying and he knew he should not be alive right now.

"Merlin's beard, Harry," Abiah said urgently. "Harry, are you all right?" he asked when Harry didn't even look at him.

Harry slowly looked up and nodded, and then he got back to his feet. He didn't feel tired anymore, he felt strong, powerful. "I'm fine, Abiah." Harry said resolutely and wandlessly he summoned his shirt and robes. He cast a cleaning charm over himself and dressed and then he picked up the two founder's swords and conjured sheaths for them. "Abiah," Harry said, as he sheathed the two swords and moved swiftly into Salazar's Chamber. "You heard all of that, right?"

“Indeed, I did, and I cannot believe my ears... What are you doing?” he asked curiously, as he watched Harry open the glass cabinet in the library.

“Destroying Tom’s Horcruxes,” he said evenly and pulled down a phial of Basilisk Venom.

--

A/N: So sorry it took so long to get this out. Had a bit of writer’s block and then life leaped in the way and trampled me to death with schoolwork, but that’s the way things go.

## Chapter Forty-Two – Possession and Attack

Harry watched as the last of the Horcruxes in his possession disintegrated under the power of the Basilisk venom. Abiah floated a few feet away and Harry breathed out heavily. "It's done."

"And if he creates another?" Abiah asked quietly.

Harry looked over at the ghost and then raised an eyebrow. "The longer I stay alive," he said seriously.

Abiah only nodded and looked over at Salazar's Scimitar. "You are not going to destroy yours as well?"

Harry shook his head. "No, not yet, I might still need it," he said with a small half smile.

Harry waved his wand and conjured the time. "I'm going to be late for my second class. Hermione's already going to kill me for not being at breakfast," he said heavily and pushed himself up from the floor. He swayed a moment as his heart started to race and then he abruptly sat back down. "Maybe I'll stay a while longer," he said uneasily.

"Are you all right, Harry?" Abiah asked, floating closer to him.

Harry nodded. "Yeah, I'm fine." The ghost looked at him skeptically. "Really, my body is still adjusting to the magic I absorbed. It'll pass," he lied. He had no idea if it would. He'd not felt this way the last time at all, though the last time he hadn't dwelled in the dark current, he hadn't fully taken Hogwarts' magic onto himself. Harry shook his head and stood again. His vision blurred but then cleared and he took in a deep breath. "All right, off to class with me." He forced himself to sound normal and made his way out of the Chamber. Abiah simply watched him go, before floating off.

Harry took his time leaving the Chamber. Mortedolv was off hunting in the tunnels, which was a relief in Harry's mind. He hadn't told the Basilisk about his deal with Death yet, and didn't want to know his friend's reaction, which was why he had no intention of telling anyone else. He didn't know how long it would be before he had to give

himself over to Death, but he was determined to enjoy his life while he still had it. If they all knew, he wouldn't be able to enjoy his time left.

As Harry walked into his dorm in Gryffindor Tower for his books, he suddenly chuckled to himself for no apparent reason. A laugh quickly followed and then he found himself laughing quite hysterically. It all suddenly came to a stop and he grabbed the nearest bedpost as pain laced through his head. He fell to his knees and cried out as the pain tripled and he grabbed his head in pure agony, not even having the will to put thought to what the hell was happening to him.

"Harry!" a voice suddenly yelled and everything stopped.

Harry, breathing heavily, slowly looked up to Ron from his hands and knees. "It's still there," he whispered in horror.

"What is?" Ron asked staring at Harry and then he quickly grabbed a towel hanging nearby. "Merlin, Harry, you're bleeding!" he said urgently and pressed the towel to Harry's head. Harry put his hand over Ron's and the red head took his hand away and stood. "Don't go anywhere, I'm getting Madam Pomfrey."

Harry watched a bit dazed as Ron swept out of the room. He blinked at the empty doorway as he sat back on his knees, still holding the towel to his head. He was going into shock, he was sure of it. Voldemort's Horcrux was removed. He knew it was. Wasn't it?

"Harry," Sirius suddenly said, kneeling down in front of him.

Harry looked up at his godfather with confusion in his eyes and then abruptly he had the overwhelming urge to get out of the school, as far away from it as possible. He didn't know where the feeling was coming from but he couldn't ignore it. He pushed Sirius out of the way, letting the towel fall as he stood. "I have to leave," he hissed quietly to himself.

"Harry," Remus stopped him in the doorway. "Where are you going?"



"I have to go, I have to leave," Harry said simply and then pushed passed Remus and then several classmates lingering in the stairwell.

Remus and Sirius quickly followed after him and then got into his way before he could reach the portrait hole. "Harry, you need to see Madam Pomfrey, clearly you're unwell," Remus urged.

Unusually the common room held quite a few Gryffindors for just before second period. Among them were the fifth years and Harry's friends. Their eyes darted quickly back and forth between their professors and Harry, wondering what was going on. Hermione stepped forward and looked at Sirius and Remus questioningly, but didn't get a chance to ask, as Harry spoke up.

"I'm fine, please move," Harry said with a slight edge to his voice and a blank look in his eyes. Remus and Sirius shared a glance.

"You aren't leaving, Harry," Sirius finally said.

Harry glared at Sirius and Sirius glared back, narrowing his eyes at him.

Harry closed his eyes for half a second before he opened them again, they were cold as ice. Harry twitched his hand; his wand came to his fingers and was pointed at Sirius and Remus not a second later. Harry wasn't an idiot, he knew this could get him expelled for good, but he didn't care, he had to leave now!

"Move," Harry stated simply.

Sirius frowned. "We will not, and you will lower your wand, Potter," he ordered.

"No, Black," Harry hissed through clenched teeth. "Now move out of my way!"

Sirius eyes flashed dangerously and before Harry could blink, Sirius had his wand pointed at him, "Incarcerous."

Harry jumped aside before the ropes could bind him. He aimed his wand. "Stupefy!" A loud bang suddenly sounded and Harry was nearly knocked off his feet by the blast that had come from his own wand. Harry felt the wood burn his hand. He dropped it and looked stunned at it as it hit the floor, rolling a few feet away.

Remus picked it up, his own wand still pointed at Harry, disappointment in his eyes. "Severus thought you may try and use your wand against one of us one day. We didn't want to believe him, but we let him put the spell on your wand anyway."

Harry stared with disbelief, confusion and betrayal in his eyes. "What?" he asked as he backed away from Sirius and Remus' wands. What was going on?

"Harry," Sirius took a step forward and Harry flinched back violently.

"Don't touch me!" he hissed out as he looked around the room, at everyone staring at him. He couldn't believe Severus had cursed his wand, and Sirius had let him. Rage swelled within him. The Veritaserum had hurt him deeply; finding out about this was just adding salt to his already agitated wounds.

"Harry, I'm not going to hurt you, no one is going to hurt you. Please, calm down," Sirius urged, taking another step forward.

Harry wasn't listening, he didn't even really hear Sirius' words. He was feeling caged in and he had to get out, now! "I never thought I'd come to hate my Godfather!" Harry hissed harshly, a golden fire coming to his eyes. "Move out of my way or you will come to regret ever hearing the name Harry Potter!"

Gasps came from the large group of Gryffindors as they started to back away.

Sirius flinched slightly at Harry words, but stood his ground. "No."

Harry didn't know where it came from but it was as if something welled up inside him and took control. Harry blinked and in that moment, golden chains shot out of the floor and wrapped themselves

around Sirius. Sirius gasped in pain as the chains burned his skin and he dropped his wand as he was forced to his knees. Harry's eyes snapped widened and he shook his head fearfully. It was the school, but he hadn't wanted this. What the hell was happening?

"Harry!" Remus shouted. "What are you doing?!"

"No!" Harry shouted in desperation as Sirius cried out as the chains did further harm. "No, stop!" Harry yelled, but nothing happened. Harry closed his eyes tightly as Sirius cried out again and Remus tried to get his friend free uselessly. The students in the room stared horrified at what they were seeing.

Why wasn't the school listening to him? "Please," Harry begged as he fell to his knees.

"Command Hogwarts," a small voice came into his mind. "Command her, and she will listen, she's only trying to protect you."

Harry jumped to his feet. "Hogwarts I command you, in the name of the Protector, release him at once!" Harry shouted, the chains instantly vanished, and Harry sunk back to his knees and let out a breath of relief. The relief was short lived, however, when he saw the looks on everyone's faces, especially the look on his godfather's and Remus' faces. It was of fear, revulsion and hatred. Tears came to Harry's eyes and he quickly got back to his feet. "I-I'm sorry," Harry whispered before he ran from the common room, his wand forgotten.

Harry ran all the way to the Entrance Hall and stopped when he saw Dumbledore standing before the giant double doors with several other staff members. He looked back over his shoulder where he saw Sirius, Remus, Ron, Hermione, and several other Gryffindors running towards him. Harry dropped onto the stone steps, breathing heavily, why the hell was he running? There wasn't anywhere for him to go. He was so confused.

Sirius stopped cautiously next to his godson. Remus, Ron and Hermione stayed at the top of the stairs with the others. Sirius hesitantly put a hand on Harry's shoulder. "Harry?"

Harry closed his eyes and he took in a shaky breath and looked up to Sirius. "I'm so Sirius. I lost control. You have every right not to trust me... I – I don't know what's happening..."

"I do trust you, Harry," Sirius said firmly. "I just –"

Harry shook Sirius' hand off his shoulder and stood up as anger came out of nowhere and overrode his hurt. "No you don't! You tried to feed me Veritaserum without my consent! You allowed a curse to be placed on my wand!" Harry yelled. "I can't control my life! I can't control what I am! I didn't ask for this! I didn't ask to be the Boy-Who-Lived or the Chosen one! I hate those titles, I have always hated them! Every day since I was brought back I have wished I was dead because of those titles!" Harry was screaming now; not caring or even realizing what he was saying. "Everyone just stood there and watched while I was tortured to death, as I died! No one has ever been there when I needed help! I try and rid the world of the most evil man in existence at the cost of my life and what do I get for it? Suspicion! Hatred! Why do I even bother anymore? Why should I help people who are only going to turn their backs on me and watch me – Aah!"

Harry suddenly collapsed back on the stairs and clamped his hand over his scar, as a shooting pain ran through his head and then he clasped at the burning mark on his left forearm.

"Harry!" Snape exclaimed as he ran up the stairs toward Harry, almost shoving Sirius back in his haste. He was clutching his own arm.

Harry slowly nodded in answer to Severus' unasked question, and then his eyes widened as he felt the Death Mark on his chest heat up. Harry hissed and grasped at his chest as pain overruled the pain from his other two scars and the Mark started throbbing, almost like a beacon.

"Harry," Sirius asked kneeling down next to him. "What's happening?"

Harry took in a deep breath and pushed himself back to his feet with a fluid grace he didn't think he should have at that moment as his

limbs were shaking. He looked directly at Dumbledore as he spoke with a controlled voice. "He's here. Voldemort's here and he's brought Dementors, lots of them."

"And serpents, I saw them, there are many, my young heir. On the lawn, approaching the castle from the forest, there are students out there!" Abiah said urgently as he came through the wall.

Harry froze momentarily at Abiah's words. His eyes widened in horror as he looked at Dumbledore, who stared at the ghost oddly and then back at Harry. "The first years," Dumbledore suddenly whispered.

Harry didn't hesitate as he ran down the rest of the stairs and with a small blast of magic pushed past Dumbledore and banged the doors open and ran in the direction of Hagrid's hut and the Care of Magical Creatures class and flying lesson he knew was starting right at that moment.

He stopped, breathing heavily, on the grounds between Hagrid's hut and the school as a group of fourth year students ran towards him. It was a group of Gryffindors and Slytherins. "Harry!" Ginny yelled from the back of the group as they approached. She pointed towards Hagrid's cabin. "The first years, our spells have no effect!"

Harry looked towards where she was pointing. Over fifty rather large and highly poisonous snakes surrounded the first years out for their flying lesson. Some of the students were already in the air, but many more, hadn't managed to get off the ground yet.

Harry suddenly collapsed to his hands and knees and found himself on the verge of passing out from the sudden collective effects of hundreds of Dementors that hadn't even come through the school wards yet.

"Harry!" Ginny yelled as he fell and tried to help him to his feet.

Memories of both timelines flooded through his mind as he struggled from fully collapsing. The Dementors had always affected him harshly,

but now he had so many more unhappy memories than he had when he had last encountered so many of them.

With his head in his hands, he tried to think of something, anything else than the painful memories that swept over him. All he needed to do was remember one good memory and he would break free from the Dementors' control over him. All he needed was one. That was it. But all he could see was a Basilisk and an unconscious Ginny, and then a dead Ginny. It had been his fault and tears started to drop from his eyes, before he forced himself to remember that it hadn't happened, not yet, NOT EVER! He had saved her!

Harry was shaken only briefly from his thoughts as he felt Sirius grab his shoulders, he was barely aware of it as the screams of a past that no longer existed engulfed his mind. He couldn't give into a past that was no longer. Sirius was speaking to him, but Harry didn't register it as he clasped onto his shoulders for support. In Harry's mind the man before him was dead, but in this time, he was alive because Harry had protected him.

He would protect all of them. He was the Protector of Hogwarts. It was his duty! Harry suddenly opened his eyes, a gold flame consuming them. He pushed Sirius away and stood with determination. He had made everyone's life better. He had made his life better. The Dementors were not going to take his happiness away. Voldemort was not going to take his happiness away! No one was!

Harry's memories drifted over the past years, all of the pain, all of the good moments, over everything he'd changed. Harry retrieved his wand with a quick wandless summoning charm and it flew from Remus' startled grasp somewhere behind him. He did this all calmly, though there were more than three dozen panicking students now around him, including much of the staff.

He took in those around him. All the houses were outside on the grounds of Hogwarts, Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw, from the first year class, and Slytherin and Gryffindor from the fourth year class. Some of the older students, who had been out on the grounds for various reasons were trying to maintain order and usher the younger students up to the school at the insistence of the Professors. Remus, Sirius,

Severus, and his friends, now had their wands all drawn and were trying to keep the students from the gathering of serpents while Dumbledore himself started to advance towards the serpents. The first years, surrounded by the snakes were starting to panic as they were herded closer together and the Care of Magical Creature's Professor and Madam Hooch, who were trying not to panic themselves, were trying every spell they knew to get the snakes to back off.

Harry walked through all of the panicked chaos around him, toward the front, toward the snakes. Harry passed by many, but did not look at his friends' worried and frightened faces as he moved to stand in front of the large group of students and teachers. Harry gave little head of what he was about to reveal. Most would hate him, maybe even fear him after this, but he had no choice.

They would all die, and he wouldn't let that happen. They already knew that he was powerful, but he had kept many things from both Dumbledore and his friends, he was afraid that they might mark him as a dark wizard as the rest of the world had tried to do in the last timeline. Sure, they knew a lot, but they didn't know this, not even Voldemort truly knew this, but today he would.

Harry passed Dumbledore and raised his wand and circled it over his head, as he felt the effects of the Dementors grow stronger, as he continued to walk towards the Serpents. The Dementors had broken through the wards and were now starting to spill out onto the school grounds behind the first years.

"Expecto Patronum!" Harry said loudly and a silver mist came out of his wand and started circling with the motion he was still making with his wand. The silver mist was tinted red, as the three tiny shards from the Philosopher's Stone, embedded in the palm of his hand, glowed with power. If he had done the charm normally, Prongs, his corporeal Patronus, would have shot out of his wand. This was a nifty trick he had created himself through hours of research. Technically, it was a ward and not a charm he was using. "Expecto Patronum!" Harry said a second time and the mist grew in quantity and continued to swirl around him even after he had lowered his wand and drawn a rune in the air with his left hand. The Dementors seemed to ignore the

students as they turned in his direction and the mark on his chest pulsed painfully. The power from the stones swirled around him and poured out of his hand and around his wand radiating him with a blood red aura.

Severus, who had been motioning students away from Harry when he saw what he was doing, called his name with clear worry and amazement in his voice, and tried to run towards him, but was stopped by Dumbledore, who pulled him further back. Harry ignored him. As he ignored Remus, Sirius, Ron, and Hermione's shouts as well; he had already begun the ward and he couldn't stop now. He did need to stop the advancing snakes, though. He set his mind to the ward, as he let his mouth do the taking.

"Stop," Harry commanded loudly in Parseltongue, and the collective shouts from the snakes nearly made him lose concentration, as well as the gasps from the students, and had Harry seen the look on Albus Dumbledore's face, he would have lost is completely. No one but Sirius, Severus, Remus, and Hermione had ever heard him speak the language of the snakes in this time, so of course this was rather shocking. "Stop," Harry hissed again and the snakes did. "Leave and I will spare and protect you from the tainted serpent speaker."

The snakes hissed and reared up collectively. The first years screamed and cried out. "How do we know you will and can protect us?" They questioned and Harry's eyes blazed with a fury that got the snakes attentions.

"I am the true heir of the Slytherin line, leave now!" Harry commanded angrily, though he wasn't sure where such a declaration came from. Sweat started to bead on his forehead. The strain of creating the ward was beginning to be too much. "Leave now!" he repeated again and his words were filled with more venom then that of the snakes and the snakes looked around at each other and hissed amongst themselves before they turned towards the forest and left the grounds. Harry nearly fell to his knees again as the Dementors were coming nearer to him, just where he wanted them.

Severus and the others were still yelling his name as they ushered the first years away from the forest, but didn't dare approach and



Harry could see out of the corner of his eye that the rest of the staff were making their way out of the school, no doubt at the sound of the wards collapsing. Harry looked up to the approaching Dementors, his teeth clenched. They had chosen to side with Voldemort, there would be no mercy for them.

He released his ward onto the approaching Dementors. The red-silver mist shot away from him in a widespread semi circle and formed corporeal nets that wrapped themselves around large groups of the Dementors. There were screams all over the grounds, but it wasn't from the students, but the Dementors as the nets did their job, crushing the Dementors into nothing but dust, and releasing hundreds of souls. The sight was amazing and left everyone silent and wide-eyed. No one had ever killed a Dementor before, let alone hundreds of them.

Harry fell to one knee as the Dementors vanished, sweat dripped down his face, but he did not move, or even blink as a shrill laugh echoed over the grounds. "Voldemort!" hissed Harry as his scar burned.

"Dumbledore's noble Gryffindor is an heir of Slytherin. This is too rich. Perhaps it was wrong of me to want to kill you, Potter, as it seems you could easily be my heir."

Harry stared at the spot that he knew Voldemort was, even though he had yet to show himself. Everyone else was looking around in fear. "Show yourself, Tom, so I can kick your ass like I did at the World Cup!" Harry shouted.

Voldemort finally showed himself and he was standing only a few yards in front of Harry. "I don't know how you defeated me then, but it won't happen again!"

Harry smiled coldly at his handy work from the last summer. "How's the arm, Tom, missing it much?" Harry sneered.

Voldemort glanced briefly at his left side, at the arm that should have been there, but had been destroyed during Harry's failed attempt to kill him. "You will pay for that," Voldemort said lightly and then

smirked when he saw Harry raise his glowing wand at him. "Not this time, Potter. Imperio!"

Harry's eyes widened as the spell came towards him before he had the chance to defend himself. The curse hit him in the chest and his vision blurred as he felt himself relax into the feel of weightlessness. "Come to me, Harry..." Harry ignored the soft commanding voice and stayed where he was. "Come to me, Harry!" The voice demanded again and Harry was losing his battle against it. He knew it was bad, but it was telling him that he was safe, that everything would be fine if he did as the voice commanded. "Join me!"

"HARRY!" Harry snapped out of the curse as Hermione yelled his name so loudly that Harry was shocked out of the curse. He opened his eyes and found that he was face to face with Voldemort.

"NEVER AGAIN!" shouted Harry angrily and he quickly raised his hand and cast the Banishing Charm, which threw Voldemort several yards away from him as if he had slapped the Dark Lord away like an insect, which was what Harry really wanted to do. Tears came to his eyes, with the anger that radiated off him, the anger towards Voldemort, the anger that was towards himself. He had almost fallen for the imperious curse again. The last time that had happened, he had killed Ginny. "Never again," he spit out the word with a wavering voice as if it was poison.

That was when he was hit with the Cruciatus Curse from both sides; he hadn't even seen the disillusioned Death Eaters entering the grounds, no one had, so focused were they on Harry. Harry dropped to his knees as the pain washed over him, but he clenched his teeth and raised his hands and banished the one on his right with his wand and the one on his left with his hand.

Voldemort had gotten to his feet while Harry was distracted and had raised his wand to kill Harry. The Killing Curse soared towards him and Harry knew he didn't have the time to dodge. He dropped his wand and placed his right hand in the path of the green beam on instinct and concentrated on the shield he'd inadvertently done the other day in Potions class. The curse shot into his hand, into the green tinted shield, and then rebounded hitting a Death Eater, who

dropped dead. Harry got to his feet breathing heavily and ignoring the pain that was building in his palm.

“Impossible!” Voldemort shouted, and raised his wand again to use another lethal spell.

However, Harry just stared at him with a smirk on lips. He had other plans. “Helga, Godric, Rowena, Salazar,” he whispered. A ripple of energy could be felt by all on the grounds. “Hogwarts Protect us!” As soon as the soft words left his mouth, the wards that had previously fallen, swept out from the castle and grounds, with a pale golden glow, to banish all those that wished the students harm, namely Voldemort and his servants.

Harry staggered forward as the wards swept over him and pain exploded in his head, briefly and then he felt as if he was suddenly released from something he hadn’t even known was clamping down on his soul. It was the piece of Voldemort’s soul. It disintegrated in the air in front of him as the wards seemed to pause in time before rushing towards Voldemort and the rest of the Death Eaters.

Disappointment and anger blossomed in Harry’s eyes as Voldemort and his Death Eaters vanished before the wards could hit them. “Next time, next time I will kill you, Tom,” Harry whispered to himself as he stared out onto the deserted grounds. He finally turned around, breathing heavily, when he remembered that he wasn’t alone; everyone was still there, staring at him.

“Oh fuck.”

--

A/N: Yes I know it’s been forever. The muse flew away, but then came back and smacked me in the face, funny how that works.

## Chapter Forty-Three – The Indisputable Truth

“Oh fuck.”

“Indeed, Harry,” Dumbledore muttered as he stared hard at him.

Harry cringed and then looked around at everyone. There were far more people out here than he thought there had been. “Umm, is anyone injured?” Harry asked as everyone kept staring at him.

“Harry, y-you just caught the Killing Curse,” Hermione said shakily, taking a step towards him.

Harry blinked at her and then looked at the palm of his hand. “Yeah, ouch,” he muttered.

The palm of his hand was rather chard. Harry looked closer and then without so much as flinching, picked one of the now pure white shards out of his hand. He looked at it for a moment and then dropped it to the grass. He was about to reach for another when Sirius stepped forward, stopping him.

“Harry.”

Harry looked up into Sirius’ eyes. “I should be dead,” he said with certainty and fisted his burnt hand, clenching his teeth at the pain, but not caring. He should not have been able to catch the curse, even as powerful as he’d become, but his oath had intervened again.

Harry suddenly snorted and then laughed. He couldn’t help himself. He’d not fully registered what Death had revealed to him before, but now he suddenly understood, quite clearly. All of this; him coming back in time, him coming back from the dead, him being able to catch the bloody killing curse. It was all because of his fucking oath that he would destroy Voldemort. Harry had failed before, because he’d died before Voldemort had. And now it was quite apparent that he would never be able to rest until his oath was fulfilled. Harry quickly sobered. He’d cursed himself to torment with just a few words.

“Harry, you’re hurting yourself,” Hermione said lightly.

"Yes," Harry said simply. "I am." But what he'd meant was entirely different in the scope of things. Hermione just stared at him strangely.

"Harry, are you...?" Remus began, but Harry interrupted.

"For now, I'm find Remus. But I foresee that the ministry will be coming to question me shortly, I have a feeling they're not going to like this when they find out." Harry looked at the students, who were now whispering amongst themselves, having gotten over their shock, it was only a matter of time before the Wizarding World knew.

Suddenly Cedric stepped forward. "On behalf of the House of Hufflepuff, we thank you for saving Hogwarts and deem that even the Protector needs protecting."

Harry raised an eyebrow at that.

"On behalf of the Ravenclaws, the knowledge of what you are will not leave Hogwarts grounds," Cho said, stepping forward.

Ron nodded and stepped forward as well. "On behalf of the Gryffindor House, we will stand beside the Protector until he no longer needs us."

"On behalf of the House of Slytherin, Hogwarts is a second home to all of us. We will defend you and it at all costs," Draco announced.

Harry stared oddly at all of them and then he chanced a look at Dumbledore who was staring at his students with astonishment in his eyes. Harry was just as astounded. He hadn't expected them to stand up for him, and in the name of all the Houses...

Dumbledore finally seemed to come to himself and cast Sonorus. "All students, please report to the Great Hall," he said and then cancelled the spell, Harry was sure had been heard within the school as well. "Harry, if you would join me in my office."

Harry could only nod and follow the Headmaster, as the students looked at him briefly and then did as ordered. A couple of the

professors went with them at Dumbledore's direction, but the rest all followed Dumbledore.

Harry had only walked a few feet when a hand landed on his shoulder. He stopped and looked over his shoulder at Severus. "Harry, a moment," Harry nodded and turned towards the man. Severus suddenly pulled back his left sleeve.

At first, Harry didn't understand what Severus was trying to show him, and then he understood and his eyes widened. Severus' arm was unblemished. "How?" asked Harry, gently touching the man's forearm.

"You did it," Severus said with a small smile.

Harry only shook his head. "I didn't, but Hogwarts did." Harry suddenly pulled back his own sleeve and smiled a small smile of his own. "Well that's one less thing to blacken my soul when I die," he whispered.

Severus grabbed a hold of Harry's shoulders. "You are not going to die!" he said severely.

Harry stared at him for a moment. "We all die eventually, Severus," he said simply and then turned to follow Dumbledore. Severus stared after him for a moment and then quickly followed.

A few minutes later in the Headmaster's office, Harry sat down tiredly in one of the armchairs, Dumbledore conjured. He could imagine how the news was spreading in the Great Hall, as well as the swearing of secrecy. But an oath from the Ravenclaw house wasn't going to keep the Professors from talking, and they were now who Harry was rather worried about, most importantly the professors he didn't know very well. Or who hated him. Harry looked briefly over his shoulder to see Professor Mordant staring at him.

Dumbledore finally took his seat as everyone else finished sitting, they all quieted and looked to Dumbledore expectantly. But Harry spoke before the Headmaster could.

"I suppose you want an explanation of what happened today," Harry said, looking up at Dumbledore.

"Yes, Harry, I do. Obviously you Protected us all from Voldemort today." Many of the professors flinched at the name. "And we owe you thanks, we were woefully unprepared for an attack of that scale. But what I want to know is what precipitated that attack. You did not seem at all surprised when he arrived."

"I wasn't. I didn't anticipate it as I should have, but I wasn't surprised. He attacked because of me, because of something I did this morning," Harry said honestly.

"What did you do, Harry," Sirius questioned for the lot of them.

"To understand, how and why, I should probably explain a couple of other things first," Harry said carefully. Dumbledore nodded for him to go on. Harry took a deep breath and then released it. "As you're all now rather aware, I'm a Parselmouth. I lied and pretended I wasn't, when you asked professor, but I didn't get it from Voldemort," Harry said quickly when Dumbledore looked like he was going to question him. "I inherited it, though I didn't know that until recently."

"Inherited it, only the Slytherin line has been known to produce Parselmouths," Mordant spoke up with a scoff in her voice. "And we all know that there is only one person of that line left."

Harry glared over his shoulder at her. "I am of the Slytherin line," he said firmly and then looked back at Dumbledore. "Just not through Salazar Slytherin, but his brother, Abiah Slytherin."

"Abiah Slytherin, I don't believe I've ever heard of him, Mr. Potter?" McGonagall said with clear question in her voice.

"Abiah, was the ghost you saw today," Harry said to Dumbledore. "He's probably hiding know, he doesn't like to show himself unless necessary. Salazar killed him for killing his eldest son."

"I recall something about that in Hogwarts a History, it was barely mentioned though and didn't give any names," Flitwick commented.

"It wouldn't have. Salazar helped write the original edition of that, he wouldn't want it known that his son was the one who had been murdering Muggles and Muggleborns, not him, which was why Abiah killed him. Salazar covered it all up after Abiah's death and took the blame, so that his son wouldn't go down as a tyrant in history."

"That is quite a story, but how does that make you his heir?" Mordant questioned.

Harry smirked at her. "Abiah's son, after the Slytherin name fell, changed his name to Potter, married Gryffindor's daughter, and started the line of the Lords Potter."

"Well that would make you an heir of Gryffindor as well," Sirius spoke up. "That's rather cool."

"Yes, Hermione agrees, but I only told you all this so you'd understand where I got the Parseltongue from. And now I should ask you all not to start firing curses at me or anything when you hear the next part," Harry said, biting the inside of his lip.

Dumbledore looked around at the staff and then nodded. "Go on."

"I opened the Chamber of Secrets and that's where I've been disappearing to since the summer before second year," Harry said rather bluntly, waiting for the outburst he knew was about to come. He was surprised, however when McGonagall suddenly spoke up with curiosity.

"What of the monster?" she asked.

Severus leaned in next to her. "Remember the Basilisks," he said simply and her eyes widened.

"You released them! On yourself!" she suddenly shouted and Harry glared briefly at Severus.

"No! No, not at all, Pettigrew released the one on the school, at Voldemort's orders, trying to get me in trouble. The second Basilisk is,



however, the one from the Chamber, and is my friend, he was trying to save me, when the other one petrified me.”

“You are friends with a Basilisk?” Sprout questioned carefully, while the others could only stare at Harry.

“I know, I can’t believe it either, and I’ve seen them talk,” Sirius muttered. “It’s creepy.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Yes, I’m friends with a Basilisk. His name’s Mortedolv and he’s rather smart. He was Salazar’s pet, though I suppose he was probably a fledgling at that point.”

“I’m sure there was a point in your revealing of all of this, Harry,” Remus muttered to him and Harry nodded.

“Anyways, last night, I fully invoked the powers of the Protector, all of the magic of Hogwarts, and took it into myself, and this morning, using Mort’s Venom, I destroyed Voldemort’s Horcruxes,” Harry answered honestly.

Severus, Sirius and Remus’ eyes all widened and Dumbledore stood from his seat, looking at Harry in part shock, part fear. “All of them?” he questioned.

“Unfortunately no,” Harry said as he shook his head. “Of the six –”

“He did make six,” Dumbledore said almost shakily and slowly sat back down.

Harry only nodded. “Actually eight including himself, but one was destroyed before I was born. Out of the six others I’ve destroyed two, and now Hogwarts has destroyed one,” Harry explained. “Voldemort still has four including himself, but I’ve someone helping me with those. I can only assume that he’s destroyed or taken them, or Voldemort wouldn’t have likely attacked the school so readily. He probably came to prevent me from destroying the one left I had – had inside of me.”

“Wait, I thought that was the point of invoking the magic last night, Harry, to transfer the Horcrux that was inside of you,” Remus said staring at Harry.

“You were a Horcrux?” Dumbledore asked, looking rather pail.

Harry only nodded yes to both questions. “Somehow the Horcrux wasn’t transferred last night. This morning after I destroyed the other two, and what I thought was the transferred one, Voldemort decided to attempt a bit of possession. He couldn’t fully, because Hogwarts protects me, but he did plant some crazy idea that I had to leave Hogwarts, I’m sure it was his attempt at getting me out of the wards. I’m sorry Sirius, that’s why I attacked you. I couldn’t ignore the compulsion, it was like it was drilling into my head and it was the only thing I could think about.”

“It’s all right, Harry. We assumed the Horcrux had been removed, we couldn’t have predicted that he’d attack your mind like that.”

“Hogwarts destroyed it anyways, when I brought the wards back up. It also removed Severus’ mark, and – and mine.”

Mordant stared at Harry intently. “Mark?” she asked after a few moments of silence while everyone seemed to process all the new information.

“Harry was branded with the Dark Mark, somehow, between his first and second year,” Dumbledore said gravely. “None of that, however, explains how you knew about the Horcruxes in the first place. I only recently considered them.”

Harry looked around him, he looked at Severus who nodded. It was time. It was time he came clean about who he really was. He looked back to Dumbledore. “Ask me how long I’ve known that I was the Protector.”

“How long have you known that you are the Protector of Hogwarts?” Dumbledore questioned simply, though his eyes now held profound curiosity.

Harry closed his eyes and let out a sigh. He open his eyes and looked again into those of the Headmaster's. "Five years, I've known for five years," Harry stated.

"You've known since you first came to Hogwarts?" Dumbledore questioned.

Harry shook his head. "No." Harry swallowed. "I've known since the end of sixth year, five years ago," Harry said quietly, calmly, and Dumbledore's eyes narrowed as he stood again.

"What is that supposed to mean?" Mordant asked with a scoff.

Harry ignored her and continued to look up at Dumbledore. "I'm not your Harry Potter; well I am, sort of. I'm from a different time. A future in which, I have defied Lord Voldemort six times, and finally killed him, but not before he managed to give me a mortal wound. I died, just before he did. And then I found myself at the feet of my eleven-year-old body, in the chamber of the Philosopher's Stone, as a ghost. I think the Harry of this time may have died. He was clutching the shattered remains of the stone. I touched it, and when my hand went through that and his hand, I was sucked into my younger self's body. We have the same past, the same soul, we are the same person, just from different times."

Dumbledore stepped out from behind his desk, not taking his eyes off of Harry. Harry was beginning to wonder if he had done the right thing in telling him, as he couldn't discern the emotions that the Headmaster was hiding. Not one other person even moved as they stared at him and Dumbledore, waiting for... something.

Harry suddenly stood. "Please..." Harry took in a deep breath and then sighed and looked away from the Headmaster; he didn't know what he was pleading for from the silently staring man. Harry shook his head after a moment. "You don't believe me. I shouldn't have said anything, but there is no other explanation for all I know, all I can do. I'm the only one who can kill Tom Riddle and I will, but this time, not at the price of this school or my friends. I will not turn my back on my destiny, and I will not turn my back on my duties. I am the Protector of Hogwarts. I am the Chosen One. You can either turn your back on

me, or accept what I am telling you, and help me,” Harry said loudly and with determination blazing in his eyes. “For as powerful as I am, I cannot do this alone,” Harry added as he looked around at the other staff who were gaping at him, with the exception of Sirius, Severus, and Remus, who were staring at Dumbledore.

Dumbledore stayed silent as he surveyed the teen in front of him. “You are Harry James Potter?” he finally asked.

Harry held up his wand in front of him and pointed it towards himself. “I swear on my magic, I am Harry James Potter.” The warm glow surrounded him briefly and Dumbledore nodded.

“You certainly have a way of achieving the impossible, Harry,” Dumbledore finally said and Harry let out a breath, he didn’t know he was holding. “While you’re telling us everything, is there anything else you’ve been keeping from us?” he asked and Harry looked at Severus, Sirius and Remus.

“Besides the fact that they knew everything already, I don’t think so... actually, yes, I forgot to mention I found the Chamber of Salazar Slytherin and the Founders Library. Now, now, I’ve told you everything, I think...”

“Indeed. I have only one question left to ask.”

Harry looked at the Headmaster, “Sir?”

“How’s your hand?”

Harry blinked and then looked down at his hand, he stared at it. Where his hand had been chard, now it was perfectly unblemished with the exception that he could clearly see the two, now red pieces of the stone just under his skin.

“Apparently fine,” Harry finally said, looking up at Dumbledore, just as perplexed as he was.

--

AN: The whole school now knows that he's the Protector, and the professors that he's from the future, but how long can they keep it a secret from the world?

## Chapter Forty-Four – Displacement

For the next few days after his secrets were revealed, every morning, the first thing Harry did when he got to breakfast, was look over the Daily Prophet for any sign of his secret having been leaked to the press. Thankfully and amazingly enough, Harry always found nothing. There were articles about him, there were always articles about him, but there was nothing about him being from the future or him being the Protector.

After the first couple of weeks Harry stopped looking every morning, and by the end of the month, he'd stopped all together. He was still waiting though, he knew this secret couldn't be kept for very long, now that everyone knew. The ministry was still asking questions about the attack on the school and after the parents had demanded it, Aurors had been stationed at the school. Harry always felt like he was looking over his shoulder now, waiting for something to slip.

Harry was sat down to dinner after a long day of classes, when Sirius slipped into a seat between him and George, who were discussing Quidditch and Pranks among other things. He threw his arms over both boys' shoulders. "So tell me, lay it all out right here, I can take it," Sirius said rather dramatically as the two looked at each other and then at Sirius.

"Tell you what, Sirius?" Harry asked almost worriedly as Hermione looked up from her meal, as did Ron, Ginny, and Fred.

"Ronald, you are a very smart lad, please, enlighten my godson, will you."

"I'd do that, Professor, but, umm, I've no idea what you're talking about," Ron said, glancing at Hermione to see if she had any clue. She simply shrugged.

"Of course you know what I'm talking about, you, your brothers and sister have already signed out for Christmas, as has Hermione."

George smiled and then chuckled. "Harry, I do believe what Sirius is trying to ask, is why haven't you signed up to go home for Christmas like the rest of us?"

Harry looked around at the others in confusion. "I thought I told you already. The Dursley's are going on Holiday in France. I didn't have much of a desire to go, so I told them I'd stay here again, and to enjoy their Christmas and I'd see them in June."

Sirius suddenly looked grief stricken and the others gave him a sympathetic glance. Harry watched as his godfather got up, head dropped low and started to walk up to the Head Table.

"Harry!" Hermione suddenly exclaimed and Harry looked back at her.

"What, what did I do?" Harry asked startled.

Ginny shook her head. "Harry, I hate to tell you this, but you are really dense sometimes."

Harry stared at Ginny. "Am not," he complained and then looked around him at the others. "I'm forgetting something big aren't I?"

"Sirius invited us all to Christmas this year, remember?" Hermione said, nudging her friend.

Harry suddenly felt like hitting himself. "Of course he did. Excuse me, I have to go sign up to leave for Christmas," he said and got up and left the Great Hall. He didn't see the beaming face of his godfather as he held his hand out to Remus, who reluctantly handed over five galleons.

Harry was halfway back to Gryffindor Tower, still hitting himself for forgetting about Christmas with Sirius, when Luna Lovegood stepped out of a passageway in front of him.

"Oh, hello, Harry," she said in her faraway voice.

"Hey Luna, heading off to the Room of Requirement?" asked Harry.

She nodded. "I'm working on my Patronus."

"Are you, how's that going?" Harry asked with interest, he was happy to see that some of the members of the club had started to work more seriously on the Patronus Charm.

Luna gave him a distant, but frustrated glance. "Not very well, I'm afraid."

"Is there something I can help you with? I've not got Quidditch tonight, so I'm free for the evening." Harry offered.

Luna smiled. "Thank you, Harry, but Neville's already offered, and don't you have a lesson with Professor Snape tonight?"

Harry stared at Luna for a moment and then nodded. "Probably," he said with a sigh, he did have a lesson tonight, he'd just forgotten.

"Don't worry, Harry, the Wrackspurt will go away eventually," Luna said quietly and reassuringly.

"Umm, thanks, Luna. I have to go sign up to go home for Christmas, if you need any help with your Patronus, just ask."

"Thank you, Harry, see you in the Club," Luna said and then skipped off down the hall.

Harry sighed and shook his head. Wrackspurt, maybe he could use that as an excuse and skive off of Severus' lesson. Who was he kidding, that would never work. Harry hated to admit it, but his memory was getting worse. He should have remembered about Christmas.

Harry stopped in front of the Portrait guarding Gryffindor Tower a few minutes later and just stood there, staring blankly. He couldn't for the life of him remember what the password was. This was getting bad.

"Pyrotechnics," a voice chirped from behind Harry.

"Hey Katie, thanks," Harry said as he turned to look at the Chaser.



"You're forgetting things again, aren't you?" she asked as they walked into the common room.

Harry nodded. "It's the Cruciatus Curse. Severus is giving me potions for it, but I don't think they're working anymore. I completely forgot about Christmas with Sirius, and Luna just reminded me about the lesson I have with Severus tonight – we don't have Quidditch tonight do we?" Harry asked worriedly.

"No, don't worry, no Quidditch tonight."

Harry sighed. "It's getting ridiculous really."

"I'm sure everything will work out, Harry," Katie said sympathetically. "I'm going to the Club to get my homework for Defense done, want to come?"

Harry shrugged. "Sure, just let me sign up for Christmas break, and get my books."

Katie nodded and Harry, after putting his name down on the leaving list, ran up to his room to grab his Defense books, he had to finish his own homework for the class, he'd forgotten about that too. He set his potions book aside from his bag and opened his trunk to retrieve his Defense book and froze at what he saw sitting harmlessly in his trunk.

"What the hell?" Harry reached in and pulled out the swirling orb, he stared into it intently. "The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord..." Harry nearly dropped the orb as he wrenched his eyes away, to stop the recitation of the prophecy, he'd never be able to forget. How the hell did the prophecy orb from the Department of Mysteries end up in his trunk?

Harry clutched lightly at the cool orb and then stood. He'd promised that if anything strange happened, that he'd tell Dumbledore. This was rather more than strange, Harry thought as he left the room, leaving his books behind.

"Harry, thought you said you were going to get your books?" Katie asked as he came down the stairs.

"Actually, I have to go see Dumbledore." Harry held up the orb. "Somebody left me a gift."

"What is that?" Katie asked. "It's certainly pretty."

Harry shrugged. It was kind of pretty. "It's something that shouldn't be in my room," Harry said vaguely. "I'll see you in the Club in a bit," he said and walked out of the common room.

--

Severus stalked back and forth across the length of his office. Harry was supposed to be in his lesson over an hour ago. He wasn't angry, the boy had probably just forgotten. He was frustrated though, that Harry's memory wasn't getting any better, even with the modifications he'd made to his potions.

Black had found it amusing that his godson had forgotten about Christmas, but he didn't realize yet that Harry was still having difficulties remembering things. He was only glad the boy hadn't seen Lupin and him exchanging money over their wager. Harry was already upset enough about it.

Severus stopped pacing and left his office. Perhaps Harry had gone to apologize to Black and had lost the time. Severus stopped at Black's door and knocked. There was the sound of china breaking and then a muffled curse. Severus simply raised an eyebrow as the door was opened.

"Severus, can I help you?" Sirius asked, glancing over his shoulder at Lupin, and then back again.

"Yes, you might be able too," Severus said, as he looked into the man's office to see Remus, behind Sirius' back, switching several silently screaming chess pieces on the board set up on Black's desk. Severus quickly looked back to Sirius, trying to hide his amusement, but rather failing.

Sirius swung back around. "Remus!" he complained.

Remus dropped the chess piece that was poking at his fingers with its tiny sword and laughed sheepishly. "Hello, Severus."

"I always knew you were a cheat, Lupin," Severus scoffed with amusement in his voice, and then sobered. "Have either of you seen Harry since dinner?"

Sirius and Remus both shook their heads. "Nope, but we can find him quick enough," Sirius said and after waving his wand over a drawer in his desk, opened and pulled out the Marauder's Map. "I solemnly swear that I am up to no good."

Remus stood up and helped scan over the map. "Hmm, he's not in the tower, but Hermione Granger is."

"I don't see him on the rest of the map, perhaps he's in the chamber and just forgot to tell someone again," Sirius said.

Severus shook his head. "He promised Dumbledore that he'd tell someone, he wouldn't break that promise."

"Or he told Hermione," Remus suggested.

"Why don't we go ask her," Sirius suggested and walked out of his office, the other two followed.

--

Hermione put her books into her bag and then walked from her dorm into the common room. "Ready, Ron?" she asked.

Ron looked up from the game of Exploding Snaps and nodded. Seamus and Dean were deliberating on. "Sure, was only waiting on you. I think I'm close to getting the spell right, but I won't have it in time for class and I really want to show McGonagall that I can do this stuff."

“I know Ron, if I can’t help you, I’m sure that one of the Ravenclaws can.”

“Hey, Hermione, can you put my name down on the signup sheet to teach the first years transfiguration during second period tomorrow?” Lavender asked from her place beside the fireplace.

“I will, Lavender, thanks. I really need to get caught up in a couple of things and I was hoping someone would take the slot,” Hermione said gratefully and Lavender nodded.

The Club was really working out for many people. Everyone was willing to chip in for something. It was amazing how everyone was working together. Hermione followed Ron out of the common room, he hadn’t gone very far when Professors Black, Lupin, and Snape rounded a corner in front of them.

“Miss Granger, have you seen Harry?” Severus asked.

Hermione shook her head. “Not since dinner, Sir. He’s not in the tower, but obviously you knew that,” she said motioning to the map Sirius was still carrying.

“He didn’t tell you if he was going into the Chamber then?” Remus asked.

Hermione glanced at Ron and then shook her head again. “No he went earlier before breakfast.”

“What chamber?” Ron whispered to Hermione.

“If he’s not in the chamber –” Sirius said over Ron.

“And he’s not on the map...” Remus added.

“He’s in the Room of Requirement,” Severus stated and started to walk in that direction.

Hermione and Ron suddenly got into his way though. "I don't think so, Sir," Hermione blurted. "I mean why would he be there? That would just be silly," she said nervously.

"Miss Granger, one would think you were up to something," Severus said with a raised eyebrow, looking between the two.

Hermione looked to Ron, who shrugged. "Up to something, now why would we be up to... something? I'm sure Harry's around her somewhere, quite possibly he's gone back down to the chamber, he'll be up eventually I'm, I'm sure," Hermione chuckled.

"Room of Requirement, now," Severus said sternly.

Hermione and Ron visibly cringed and then walked on, the three professor following. "What chamber?" Ron whispered again.

"I'll tell you late," Hermione finally whispered back.

It didn't take long to get to the Room of Requirement and Hermione and Ron stopped in front of the visible door. Sirius moved passed them and opened the door, and then froze at what he saw. He blinked a couple times and then stepped back, closing the door behind him.

"I did wonder..." he said looking at Hermione and Ron with raised eyebrows, the two glanced at each other and bit their lips to keep from laughing at Sirius' perplexed expression.

"What exactly is going on in there, Sirius?" Remus asked curiously.

"Students are..." Remus and Severus looked at Sirius expectantly as he seemed to be trying to find the words. Hermione was red faced and Severus was obviously itching to hand out detentions for inappropriate behavior. "Studying," Sirius finished and Severus and Remus simply raised eyebrows.

"Studying?" Severus asked.

"It's a study club, Professor Snape. Harry's idea, he wanted a way to unite the houses and help us learn things that we don't often learn in classes, like healing and the Patronus Charm. He thought that if the faculty found out that Professor Dumbledore would put regulation on what we could learn," Ron confessed.

"He started a school wide study club?" Remus asked. "That's rather impressive. And students are actually participating in this?"

Hermione nodded. "They help each other. The first years are starting to learn third year Charms and Transfigurations this week. Second years are working on fourth year Potions and many of the fourth and fifth years are above N.E.W.T. level in Defense."

The three stared at Hermione with wide unbelieving eyes and Ron couldn't hold back a chuckle. "Wait till they find out we're all teaching each other," he muttered.

"I have to see this," Severus said and walked into the room himself, the others followed.

"Has anyone seen Harry?" Ron asked loudly as they walked into the Room of Requirement, mainly to get everyone's attention.

Everyone seemed to stop what they were doing, being it practicing spells, brewing potions or reading. Everyone stared at the three professors, each student obviously wondering if they should be running out of the room to avoid getting detentions and points taken.

"Harry said he had to see Professor Dumbledore. He found something in his room, an orb of some sort. He said he was going to come here for a bit afterwards, but he never showed," Katie spoke up timidly from the reading nook. "Are we in trouble?"

"No," Sirius spoke up. "No one's in trouble, we just heard about how you all are achieving such remarkable grades in our classes and had to see for ourselves."

"This is absolutely amazing," Remus commented, looking around the Great Hall sized room.

“How long ago was that, Miss Bell?” Severus asked walking over.

“A couple of hours, Sir, but he had a lesson tonight with you, so I didn’t think he was going to make it back,” Katie said.

“Maybe he’s still with Professor Dumbledore, Sir,” Ron suggested.

Remus nodded. “We’ll check there. Carry on, all, keep up the good work,” he said jovially.

It wasn’t until the three had left that all of the students went back to what they were doing, though they all looked at Hermione and Ron with questioning eyes. They only shrugged and then followed the professors out.

“Are you going to tell Professor Dumbledore about this?” Hermione asked worriedly as she and Ron followed behind the three on their way to the Headmaster’s office.

“I don’t think that will be necessary, Miss Granger,” Severus spoke for the other two. “I assume you are taking precautions, especially with the more volatile potions and spells?” he asked.

“Yes, Professor, actually the room does it for us. Even with spell casting. It puts up shields when need be and even absorbs potion explosions,” Ron said.

“It’s as if the room formed to all of Harry’s thoughts on the matter when he created it. It’s quite impressive, even Harry is still amazed by it.”

“It is impressive, Hermione,” Sirius said. “I wonder if I can create one of those rooms in my house.”

“I’m sure if you could, Sirius, every house in the Wizarding World would have one,” Remus said with amusement. “I think this one is unique to Hogwarts alone.”

“Harry suggested once that Hogwarts is sentient because of its high level of magic, almost as if the school itself is alive. Do you think that’s so Professor?” Hermione asked Remus.

“I’m not sure. I’ve never really put much thought to the matter.”

“I believe it so, Miss Granger. If it were not, why would it choose a protector?” Severus said and Hermione nodded in agreement with a smile on her face. “Canary Creams,” Severus said to the gargoyle and the five walked up to the Headmaster’s office. Before they could even get to the door, they could hear shouting and they quickened their pace.

“I am telling you, Rufus, that Harry would do no such thing!” Dumbledore very nearly yelled into the fireplace as they came into the office.

“What is going on?” Sirius asked.

Dumbledore held up his hand, to silence them. “It is not possible for him to have gotten there and back and still be in classes all day. He could not have taken it, nor does he have any kind of reason to, he already knows the prophecy.”

“He had to have taken it, Dumbledore! Only Harry Potter or the Dark Lord could have even touched the prophecy! And we both know that the Dark Lord cannot just walk into the Ministry of Magic. He’d set off so many wards that half of London would be alerted!”

“That may be so, Rufus, but Harry was not there. He was here, all day, all of his professors can attest to that, and many, many students. He didn’t even miss any meals, and I can personally swear an oath to that!”

“I don’t care who can vouch for him, Dumbledore! He broke into the Department of Mysteries, for Merlin’s sake! I want him here for questioning at the very least. The Minister is not going to turn his head at this one. If you do not bring him in, my Aurors will and this will all go very public!”



Dumbledore sighed out heavily. "Very well, Rufus, but make no mistake, it will be for questioning only. I will not have my student accused of something he did not, would not, and could not do!"

"You have one hour, Dumbledore!"

The fire turned back to its normal orange and red color and died down. Dumbledore stood staring at the flames for several very long moments, before he looked up to the five standing silently just inside of his office.

"Severus, please, could you bring Harry here."

"That's why we're here, Albus, we can't find Harry," Severus said calmly, though there was concern in his eyes.

"Katie Bell said that he was on his way here to speak with you, Sir. We thought he might still be here," Hermione spoke up.

"Did she say why he was coming to speak with me?" Dumbledore asked.

"I think it was something about an orb he found in his room?" Ron said glancing at Hermione, who nodded in agreement.

"An orb?" asked Dumbledore, sitting down at his desk heavily. "You're certain?"

Severus nodded. "Yes, that is what she told us, Albus. What is going on?"

"Someone broke into the Ministry of Magic, into the Department of Mysteries and took one of the prophecy orbs, specifically the one about Voldemort and Harry. Only either of them could have taken the orb of the shelf."

"That's why Scrimgeour thinks Harry stole it?" Sirius questioned.

"Yes, and it appears he was correct," Dumbledore said heavily.

“No! Katie said he found it in his room, anyone who could get into Gryffindor Tower could have put it there,” Hermione argued.

“Hermione is correct, Albus. She told us that he was on his way here, probably to alert you,” Remus agreed.

“Professor, if he wasn’t on the map, and he wasn’t in the Room of Requirement –”

“And he would have told one of us if he was going into the chamber...” Sirius added.

Hermione nodded. “What if, what if it was a Portkey,” Hermione said shakily.

They all looked at Dumbledore, who only looked back at them fearfully.

--

AN: Sorry for the Cliffhanger.

## Chapter Forty-Five – To Overcome Prophecy

Harry paced back and forth in the confines of the tower classroom as the professor there, for once, watched him with focused, sharp eyes. Harry shook his head and spun around on his heel. “No,” he finally stated. “He wouldn’t lie to me like that!”

“Withholding information isn’t lying, Mr. Potter.”

“But to withhold that from me, I wouldn’t be here right now if I had known that!” Harry shouted, pointing at the rather harmlessly swirling orb.

“No, you would be dead,” Professor Trelawney said seriously.

Harry abruptly sat down, knowing that to be true, but still maybe he would have chosen that over what he now knew was coming. “Why did you show this to me now? Why not before, why not four years ago when this all started and I had time to...?”

“I didn’t know I had predicted it then,” Trelawney said simply.

“Then how do you know now?” Harry asked.

Trelawney smiled slightly. “When you told us your previous life story, quite an intriguing tale really, you gave Dumbledore’s account to you of the night he met with the person who gave the prophecy. I was the only potential teacher he met with outside of Hogwarts that year, so it was quite obvious.”

“So you went to the Department of Mysteries to see what you had predicted yourself?”

“Yes, and once I heard it, I remembered giving it,” she answered plainly. “It’s quite liberating having a moment of time you’ve always believed blank, revealed to you.”

“I think we should leave that on one’s perspective, Professor,” Harry said dryly.

"Oh, cheer up, Potter. This means you aren't going to die."

"No, you're correct, Professor, it's likely I am not," Harry said derisively.

"Look, Potter, I know my prophecy doesn't give the outcome, but I have to believe that I would not predict something like that without there being some trace of a positive resolution," Trelawney argued.

"It clearly states that I'm going to turn on the school, Professor! How can there possibly be a positive resolution to that?" Harry shouted.

Trelawney shrugged. "It also clearly states that you are going to defeat Voldemort."

Harry groaned and put his head in his hands, he was developing a headache, talking to this woman. He sighed out and looked back up. "If Dumbledore knows about this, how come he hasn't locked me up yet, how come he didn't lock me up in my past?" he asked. "Clearly if I'm going to turn on the school..."

"Perhaps he believes, as I do, that some good will come out of this."

Harry shook his head and then picked up the orb, cradling it in his hands. He refused to look at it directly, not wanting to hear the prophecy again. He wished he still had the ability to see good in everything, but he was afraid he'd lost that ability the moment he'd made his deal with Death.

"The ministry is going to think I took this you know?" he said quietly, after a while. "They've probably already noticed it missing."

"That won't be a problem once they've look more closely at their records. I signed it out before I left."

"Professor, you can't just simply sign out a prophecy from the Department of Mysteries!" Harry exclaimed incredulously. "If you could do that, people would be walking in there every day to see what they predicted and show it to the world. And I would have taken the prophecy a long time ago!"

"Well I didn't exactly say it was a prophecy orb, now did I? Why do all you students believe I'm so dim witted simply because I teach divination? I signed it out as a personal artifact. I predicted the prophecy, therefore it belongs to me."

Harry raised an eyebrow at the brilliance of that. Of course, then again, why hadn't he thought of that? He could have walked into the Ministry and taken the prophecy on the same grounds. It was made about him, therefore technically belonged to him as well.

"I'm probably still going to get in trouble for this," Harry muttered to himself.

Trelawney smirked at him. "Let me deal with the legalities of it all, you have enough problems to worry about," she declared.

Harry only shook his head at her. "That is so true," he sighed, leaning his head back in his chair and staring at the ceiling tiredly. He was so very tired.

--

Harry waited patiently on the stairs outside of Dumbledore's office, just out of sight should anyone turn around and see him through the still open door, listening to the argument Dumbledore was having with Rufus Scrimgeour. The man certainly knew how to manipulate Dumbledore. He was still holding the prophecy orb in his hands as he looked over the shoulders of the five people oblivious to him.

"...What is going on?" Severus questioned.

"Someone broke into the Ministry of Magic, into the Department of Mysteries and took one of the prophecy orbs, specifically the one about Voldemort and Harry. Only either of them could have taken the orb off the shelf."

Harry smirked. Dumbledore should know better. The ministry should know better. Of course, not many who recite a prophecy ever remember doing it, so why would they put restrictions against the

seer who predicted it? The prophecy did technically belong to Trelawney as much as it belonged to Harry or Voldemort.

“That’s why Scrimgeour thinks Harry stole it?” Sirius questioned.

“Yes, and it appears he was correct,” Dumbledore said heavily.

“So little faith,” Harry muttered, a bit disgruntled, under his breath.

“No! Katie said he found it in his room, anyone who could get into Gryffindor Tower could have put it there,” Hermione argued.

“Yea, Hermione!” Harry cheered in a whisper, she’d always stand by him.

“Hermione is correct, Albus. She told us that he was on his way here, probably to alert you,” Remus agreed.

And he had been. That was until he’d been cornered by Trelawney and then dragged up to her stuffy tower, where she’d abruptly thrown up several rather shockingly powerful wards. She apparently hadn’t wanted anyone or anything to overhear or see what she had shown Harry, and with good reason. Harry honestly hadn’t suspected the woman was so good at privacy wards. He was pretty certain she’d even managed to ward against other seers.

“Professor, if he wasn’t on the map, and he wasn’t in the Room of Requirement –”

Harry groaned quietly. “Hermione you didn’t,” he whispered to himself. They’d found out about the Club and he’d missed it! He’d really wanted to see the looks on his Professor’s faces, what he wouldn’t give to have a time turner right now.

“And he would have told one of us if he was going into the chamber...” Sirius added.

Harry nodded, good reasoning, he had promised Dumbledore after all and he tended to keep his promises...

Hermione nodded. "What if, what if it was a Portkey," Hermione said shakily.

They all looked at Dumbledore, who only looked back at them fearfully.

Harry rolled his eyes walked up the rest of the stairs and entered the office. "Only the Headmaster has the ability to make a Portkey that can go through the Hogwarts wards. Hermione, you know that."

"Harry!" Hermione screeched and threw herself into his arms. Harry chuckled lightly as he hugged her with one arm. "Where have you been?" she asked after pulling away and smacking him lightly on the arm.

"With Professor Trelawney," Harry stated.

"Trelawney?" asked Ron as the others simply stared at him.

They'd obviously not expected that, well neither had Harry. "Yes." He held up the orb and then handed it to Dumbledore, who took it delicately into his hands. "Sorry you had to deal with Scrimgeour, Sir."

"You did take it, Harry," Severus stated, looking at Harry with disbelief in his eyes.

Harry raised an eyebrow, again with the little faith? "No, Professor Trelawney took it, as is her right as the seer who predicted it. She said she'd deal with the ministry. She's on her way there right now."

"Sybil stole it?" Sirius questioned in bewilderment.

Harry only nodded and stared at Professor Dumbledore. He sighed out heavily. "Why didn't you tell me the entire prophecy in fifth year? Do you have any idea what I could have changed –"

"The entire thing, Harry?" interrupted Dumbledore. "I assumed you knew the entirety of the prophecy, you've always said you have."

"No, Professor I don't, or didn't before tonight. I never got to hear the entire thing before it was destroyed and what you showed me the night Sirius... It was only half of it!" Harry said firmly. "Why would you keep something like that from me? I would never have made my oaths, and chosen to die facing Voldemort rather than submit the school to what I know is coming!"

"What is everyone talking about!" Ron suddenly shouted. "What do you mean you would have chosen to die! What the hell is going on!"

Everyone turned to gape at Ron, as if seeing him for the first time, no one seemed to want to answer, so Harry took the initiative.

"Ron, I'm from the future," he said bluntly.

Ron's eyes widened. "What?"

"He's from the future, Mr. Weasley, and we will explain everything later," Severus stated and then turned to Harry. "But he is correct, what is happening, Harry, what is the full Prophecy?"

Harry simply glanced pointedly at Dumbledore. The Headmaster sighed and then placed the orb on his desk. He then waved his wand over it. It pulsed once, then twice and then a misty shape of a younger Professor Trelawney appeared before them.

"The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches... Born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies... And the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not... And either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives... But oaths protect and save him and power be not the strength of truth... Recreated in time and born anew, the one with the power will protect all... Death and the Dark Lord will mark him as their equal, and the one with the power will turn against knowledge... The protector will fall to the Dark Lord born again, and knowledge and truth will crumble... The Dark Lord will mark him again as his equal, and the one with the power will return to knowledge to protect and vanquish his enemies... Death will free him of his obligations and truth will



come to the protector at last... The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies..."

Silence followed as the misty shape submerged back into the sphere. Everyone stared at everyone else, at Harry, at Dumbledore. Even Fawkes was still on his perch. Finally the silence was broken.

"That is not the prophecy I heard," Dumbledore stated, looking ashen faced. "The first part, yes, but..."

"You didn't know about this, but how? You were the one she recited it to... Unless, Professor, would you have Obliviated yourself of the second half of the Prophecy, to keep yourself from telling me? From stopping me from making my oaths?" asked Harry quietly.

Dumbledore stared at Harry intently, as Harry stared back at him. "It is a high probability, Harry, yes," he finally said with a lost look in his aged eyes.

"I'm sorry, b-but what does – did that mean?" Hermione asked timidly, looking around at the others, looking at Harry.

Harry closed his eyes for a moment and then opened them again. "It means, Hermione, that I'm going to turn on the school. That I'm going to fall to Voldemort, that the school is going to fall to Voldemort. That I'm going to protect him, that I'm going to kill him," Harry said bluntly as he sat down in front of Dumbledore's desk. "And if I'm unlucky enough, I'll still be alive at the end of it."

"But you'd never turn on the school!" Ron argued. "Would you?"

"Not intentionally and certainly not of his own free will, Mr. Weasley," Severus said adamantly and placed his hands on Harry's shoulders. "It won't happen, Harry, you know we won't allow it!"

Harry shook his head. "It will, believe me it will, whether we try to stop it or not," Harry said tiredly. "This prophecy will come true, I know it will," he whispered resignedly.

--

A few days later, Harry, Ron and Hermione were sitting in Salazar's Chamber with Mort, shrunken, for Ron's benefit, wrapped around Harry's shoulders. Hermione had insisted going through the founder's library for anything on breaking prophecies. Harry already knew she wouldn't find anything, just as she'd not found anything in the Hogwarts library, but he wouldn't stop his friend from looking. Who knows, maybe she would actually find something. Harry scoffed, he should know by now that there was no way to overcome prophecy. Still he supposed he could always hope.

"So I've been thinking over this Prophecy," Ron suddenly said, looking up from one of the many books they had strewn around him. "What do you suppose it meant, Death marking you as his equal?"

Harry looked up at Ron, his friend had surprisingly taken finding out about Harry's past, rather well. Though, he would bring up random questions at the oddest times, such as the day before during Quidditch practice. Harry may not be able to play in the games since he was forced to give up Quidditch because of the Willow incident, but that didn't mean that he couldn't help coach from the sidelines. In fact, the Quidditch team had insisted on it.

"The Death Mark, I'm assuming," Harry said, somewhat distractedly, the dark mark had been taken by Hogwarts, he only wished it had taken the Death Mark as well.

"Death Mark?" asked Ron looking at him questioningly.

Harry blinked at Ron for a moment and then he realized that Ron had only ever seen it once and for only a couple seconds really, and he'd been more focused on the Dark Mark at the time. He nodded and then began unbuttoned the first couple buttons on his shirt.

Hermione smirked as she glanced up from her book. "Stripping, Harry?"

Harry stilled his hands and blushed lightly and then he smirked himself. "I was only going to show Ron the Death Mark, Hermione, but if you really want me to..."

“Harry!” Hermione exclaimed and swiped at him with her Muggle notebook. Harry quickly lifted the book he’d been browsing and prepared to defend himself.

“Should I let the two of you go find a broom closet?” Ron questioned looking between the two with amusement in his eyes.

Hermione and Harry froze and looked at each other. They both blushed scarlet and then smirked evilly. Abruptly they threw themselves at Ron, who yelped and dove out of the way, just in time for the two to land in a tangled pile where he’d previously been sitting. Ron doubled over laughing as the two struggled to get up from their suddenly compromising and rather embarrassing position.

They’d just managed to get untangled when Harry let out a rather undignified squeaked and then another and then proceeded to try and tear his shirt off.

“Harry, what are you doing!” Hermione screeched, nearly doubled over laughing herself as Harry squirmed.

Harry managed to throw off his shirt just in time for the other two Gryffindor’s to see the tip of a scaly tail disappear into Harry’s trousers. “Mort, no – not –” Harry squealed, hopping around until finally the miniature Basilisk slithered out of Harry’s pant leg.

Mortedolv glared up at Harry, hissed rather threateningly and then slithered off out of the library.

Harry stood there, face crimson in embarrassment; staring after the serpent, who’d just threatened him with bighting of several significant body parts should he ever try and crush him again. He glanced at his two friends on the floor, laughing their asses off and then slowly blew a length of his fringe out of his eyes. Harry waited until Ron and Hermione seemed to get control over themselves and then spoke up quietly and with as much dignity as he could muster.

“No one ever speaks of this again,” he said simply.

Ron and Hermione burst out into hysterical laughter again. Harry simply rolled his eyes and thanked the gods that Sirius, Remus, and Severus hadn't seen that too. He looked back down at his friends, still rolling on the ground laughing and burst out into laughter as well.

--

"I can't believe I can't find anything about overcoming prophecies," Hermione said with frustration, shaking her head as the three walked down the halls towards the Great Hall for dinner.

"I can't believe V-Voldemort did that to you," Ron said for the umpteenth time, staring at Harry with complete shock and disgust in his eyes.

"Ron don't worry about it, really. It doesn't even hurt, it's just a mark," Harry reassured, glancing at Hermione. He was just glad he hadn't told either Ron or Hermione the finer details about what had happened to him after he'd been captured. "And I'm sure you'll find something, Hermione, you've only been looking for a couple of days."

"How can you say it's just a mark? I saw your Boggart, I was there in Lupin's class. I didn't understand then, but Merlin you were terrified!"

"Ron, please, it's just a memory, leave it be," Harry said firmly.

"Oh, Harry, I'm so sorry, here we are going on and on with your reassurances, when we should be the ones reassuring you," Hermione said with a sigh. "We're going to beat this prophecy!"

"Yeah, mate, we're not going to let it happen!" Ron stated fiercely.

Harry looked between his two friends, he dearly loved them both and never wanted to see himself turn against them, which was what had brought him to make the decision he was about to make. "I know we're going to try," he said quietly, though there wasn't much conviction behind his words. "I need to see Severus before dinner, I'll meet you there in a bit," Harry said and then veered off towards Severus' office. The other two watching him go with worry in their eyes.

Harry stopped outside of Severus' door, listened a moment to see if he could hear any voices, indicating if Severus wasn't alone, and then knocked gently. After a moment the door opened and Severus' raised an eyebrow at him.

"I was about on my way to dinner, is there something I can help you with, Harry?"

"Can I come in for a minute?" Harry asked.

"Of course," Severus nodded and stepped back, allowing Harry to enter. Harry looked around the office somewhat nervously while Severus closed the door and walked over to his desk. "Take a seat, Harry, and tell me what's up, clearly something is bothering you," he said motioning to the chair in front of his desk.

Harry slowly walked over and sat down. He hesitated a moment and then pulled out a thick scroll from his bag. He unrolled the multiple sheets of parchment, and then quickly handed them over to the man. "Sign that, please?" he asked simply, not looking at the man. He really didn't know what his reaction was going to be.

Severus glanced up at Harry for a moment and then over the parchments for longer. His brow furrowed and then his eyes widened. "Harry, these are adoption papers!" he exclaimed.

Harry only nodded, biting his lip. "I was wondering, if maybe you still wanted to adopt me," Harry said quietly, finally raising his eyes to look up at Severus.

"Harry, you know I would have adopted you long before now had you allowed me to. Of course I still want to adopt you. I've seen you as my son for a long time now, and that hasn't changed."

Harry smiled, but then frowned. "I'm sorry that I stopped your attempt to adopt me before. I was being stupid and selfish..."

"You don't have to apologize, Harry."

“No I do. I really wanted you to adopt me, I just, I was confused I guess. Before I came back I never really had anyone, not a parental figure anyway, that really cared about my wellbeing. I’ve always had to rely on myself. I had Sirius, but it was so fleeting, he was there and then he was gone. Mrs. Weasley tried her best, but she was Ron’s mum, not mine... And I was scared. Suddenly I was dead and I saw all of your reactions, everyone in Gryffindor tower, the three of you in Dumbledore’s office... I was so scared after I came back, I was scared about what would happen to you, if you got attached and then I died again and...”

Harry suddenly found himself wrapped in Severus’ arms as he cried into the man’s shoulder. “Shh, it’s all right, Harry. I’m here and I’m not going anywhere.”

“But what if I do? I don’t see a way of breaking this prophecy, I have no idea what’s going to happen. I don’t want to betray anyone, I don’t want to hurt anyone and I’m so afraid that I’m going to. And I’m tired, so very tired of fighting all the time...”

“You’ve been so strong, so brave. You worry about everyone else. You want to take care of everyone else and make sure they’re safe and protected. Perhaps it’s time you let someone worry about you, let someone take care of you, let someone protect you. Let me be your protector, let me be your father.”

Harry wiped his eyes and nodded. Severus smiled and Harry smiled back and Severus reached for his quill and started to sign. Just as the last signature was in place, the papers disappeared with a small pop, making both men jump slightly.

“Forgot, magical documents,” Harry chuckled and Severus laughed as well. A knock suddenly came at the door and Harry jumped up. “I’ll get it,” he said and opened the door.

“Harry, I did not think to find you here,” Professor Dumbledore said. “What with dinner already started and all.”

Harry shrugged. “I’m just hanging around with my Dad,” he said with a shy smile and Severus practically beamed at him.

Dumbledore blinked at the both of them. "I think I may have missed something."

Harry and Severus both laughed at the baffled look on the man's face.

--

AN: Yeah ok a little sentimental near the end there, but I'm in a sentimental mood and it serves as a plot devise for a later chapter, lol. :)

## Chapter Forty-Six – Conspiring Against Me

Harry was on his way up to the club from lunch when someone suddenly grabbed his wrist from behind. Harry had his wand out and pointed at his godfather's throat before he'd even understood what he was doing.

"Whoa, Harry," Sirius yelped, startled and wide eyed, as he raised his hands.

Harry lowered his wand and sighed out. "Merlin, Sirius, I'm sorry," Harry said apologetically.

"It's perfectly all right, Harry," Sirius placated and then suddenly a mischievous glint formed in his eyes. "Now I know your fan base has grown in the years and that Myrtle has had a thing for you for some time now, but are you really expecting to be jumped in the halls for sexual favors?" Sirius asked with a nearly straight face.

Harry's eyes widened and his face turned a good shade of Weasley red. He quickly looked around to make sure no one had heard that. "Don't say that too loud, you're going to give them ideas," Harry said in a slight panic.

Sirius chuckled and clasped Harry on the shoulder. "I hate to break it to you pup, but I honestly think the ideas were there to begin with," he said with a smirk and then sobered. "But really, what's got you so jumpy."

Harry shook his head. "I guess the prophecy has me a bit on edge. I don't even really know who to trust anymore, I mean, how can you really trust anyone, if you can't even trust yourself. I don't know what to expect anymore..."

Sirius looked at him with sympathy in his eyes. "That's perfectly understandable, Harry, but I really think you're pretty safe here in Hogwarts. The school will certainly protect you if nothing else," he said, squeezing Harry's shoulder reassuringly.



Harry nodded uncertainly. It hadn't been a week since he'd heard the rest of the Prophecy, and it was starting to take its toll on him. He only felt truly safe anymore when wide-awake or in the Chamber of Secrets. He wasn't sleeping more than a handful of hours a night, because nightmares plagued him. Even using his Occlumency to calm himself wasn't working anymore.

"About that, Sirius, I'm not so sure it's a good idea that I leave Hogwarts right now. I think it may be safer if I stay here during Christmas," Harry said regrettably.

Sirius frowned and let his hand drop from his godson's shoulder. Harry was sure the man was going to put up an argument, but then he sighed. "I can't say that I'm not disappointed, but if you think that's best, Harry. I'd still really like you to come. I think it would be good for you to spend some time around people you know you can trust, and who care about you, but I won't pressure you, if you're more comfortable staying here."

"I'm really sorry, Sirius."

"Don't be, it's really all right. And Severus will be here, I suppose you'll want to spend time with your new dad anyhow," Sirius said with a small smile, nudging Harry's shoulder.

Harry smiled as well. "So was there an actual reason that you risked life and limb to stop me on my way to study for my last exams before break?" Harry asked.

"Ah, yes, actually. As I've been noticing a marked improvement in my classes, I was wondering if your little club could use with some more-or-less professional Auror level dueling instruction."

Harry's eyes lit up. "Are you serious?"

"Of course I'm Sirius, who else would I be!" Sirius exclaimed and Harry chuckled, rolling his eyes. Sirius waved his hand nonchalantly. "But that's neither here nor there. I'd rather enjoy being able to teach at a higher standard for once. Not that I don't enjoy teaching the basics mind, but it doesn't really work me to my full skill level."

Harry practically beamed. He was hoping to get the Professor's to help out eventually and he was ecstatic that Sirius was offering. "If you really want to, we have a signup sheet for those who want to teach classes. It's just inside the door. Put your name in and a time. And I'm sure no one would be too dismayed with getting some extra instruction from either Severus or Remus either, if you maybe want to nudge them in the right direction."

Sirius laughed. "I'll see what I can do, Pup. Remus will probably jump at the opportunity; Severus on the other hand, may have to be worked at for a bit. You might have to play the son card and beg," Sirius whispered conspiratorially.

Harry laughed. "Right, as if that would ever work. I can just see it now..." Harry fixed an angelic, wide-eyed look onto his face and clasped his hands together. "Please, Dad, would you teach at my little study club..." Harry pouted for good measure and Sirius snorted. "He'd laugh in my face for sure."

"Well you can always challenge him to a duel. If you win, he teaches." Harry stared at Sirius a moment and then doubled over laughing. "What did I say that was so funny?" Sirius asked in perplexity. "It wouldn't be really fair, you'd of course win; we all know that." Harry only laughed harder at that. Sirius raised an eyebrow. "You don't think you'd beat him?"

Harry hiccupped and finally got himself under control. "That man has taught me everything I know, Sirius. I'd be dust in a real duel!"

"But you've beaten him before..."

"He lets me win," Harry stated. "He holds back, I know he does. I think he's afraid of hurting me, and to be honest, I wouldn't want to duel him in that capacity anyways. I don't want to hurt him..."

Sirius blinked at Harry. "He really holds back?"

Harry nodded seriously. "And he doesn't know that I know that, so please don't bring it up with him."

“Why not?” asked Sirius, confused. “I’m pretty sure he won’t be insulted that you know that he holds back during duels. He might even up your training a bit.”

Harry sighed and then looked up and down the empty hall again. “I’ve kept this from him, because I didn’t want him to feel guilty – I didn’t want to think about it for the same reason, really. But when I went after him, just after I found out I was Protector of Hogwarts, I didn’t capture him as easily as I said I did.” Sirius frowned and opened his mouth to question him, but Harry cut him off. “We dueled and he almost killed me.” Sirius gaped at Harry. “Granted I didn’t know dueling half as well as I do now, but we were on Hogwarts grounds and I used the powers of the Protector against him and he broke through them like they were nothing. If Hermione and Ron hadn’t shown up when they had...”

“You would have died,” Sirius finished in a shaken voice.

Harry nodded. “He is so much more powerful than he lets on, and – and I can’t be certain, but I think he is a Protector himself.”

“Wait, a Protector, how is that possible? Wouldn’t he know if he were one?” Sirius questioned.

Harry shrugged and shook his head indecisively. “No one really knows how the Protectors are chosen. I think it has something to do with how we see Hogwarts as our true home. It’s certainly true with me and Voldemort. But I also think it has to do with our loyalty to the school, over just our loyalty to our own house, it could be a number of things really.”

“So it’s possible for Severus to be a Protector and not know it?”

“I think so. I didn’t know I was Protector until after I thought I’d left Hogwarts for good. Had I been a normal student, or had I never come back to Hogwarts, it’s possible that I never would have known either. I think there could be any number of Protectors that don’t know who they are simply because the school hasn’t chosen to awaken them to that fact.”

“Do you think there could be other Protectors out there who know what they are, but aren’t coming forward about it, out of fear?” Sirius asked after a moment of contemplation.

Harry frowned, but then nodded. “I suppose so. I certainly had my reservations about coming forward about it. Why?”

“I was just thinking, an army of Protectors against Voldemort, he wouldn’t stand a chance.”

Harry could only blink at his godfather’s statement. He’d never thought of that, but how could you gather together those who refuse to show who they really are?

“Harry,” Hermione called, jogging down the hall, bringing Harry and Sirius out of their thoughts. “Oh hello, Professor,” she said, seeing Sirius leaning against the wall and then turned back to Harry. “Professor McGonagall would like to see you in her office.”

“Did she say why? I’m not in trouble for anything am I?” Harry questioned.

Hermione shrugged. “She didn’t say, but she didn’t have that look as if you were in trouble for anything. Of course, sometimes it’s hard to tell...” She said, trailing off in a mutter.

“I better go quickly then, just in case. You’re on your way up to the Club, right?” Harry asked. Hermione nodded. “Take Sirius with you and show him the signup sheet,” he said and started to walk in the direction of McGonagall’s office.

“The signup sheet?” asked Hermione and then her eyes widened and she beamed at Sirius. “You’re going to teach a class?” she asked excitedly. Sirius nodded. “Excellent! Do you think you could maybe get Professor Lupin and Professor Snape to teach one too? I know some fifth, sixth, and seventh years, who are getting bored with the lack of new material...”

Harry chuckled to himself as he walked around the corner and out of hearing range. He wondered what McGonagall wanted. He hoped he wasn't in trouble for anything. He couldn't think of anything that he'd done recently to annoy his Head of House. She was still a bit disappointed about losing him on the Quidditch team, but he was almost sure she'd gotten over it by now. It had been a while. Of course, with McGonagall you never really knew...

Harry was about to knock on his Transfiguration Professor's office door when it opened before he had the chance. "Come in, Potter, have a seat," McGonagall said briskly and stepped back away from the door.

Harry walked passed her timidly and she closed the door behind him with a sharp click. "Am I in trouble?" Harry blurted.

McGonagall narrowed her eyes at him and Harry sunk down into his chair. "Why, have you done something to warrant being in trouble?" she asked.

Harry shook his head. "Not that I can think of."

McGonagall smirked slightly and then took her seat behind her desk. "No, you aren't in any trouble."

Harry sagged in his chair slightly. The woman had a twisted sense of humor; it was almost Slytherin the way she kept people guessing, but that's why she was one of Harry's favorite teachers. "That's good... So what did you want to talk to me about, Professor?" he asked, perking up with interest.

"After term we will be discussing the Animagus transformation, we will only be going over the theory; however, if you are willing to go further, I will work on the transformation with you, assuming you are capable."

"Animagus, really?" asked Harry excitedly, moving to sit on the edge of his seat.

McGonagall nodded. "I think you can handle the challenge and are responsible enough not to use it for ill purposes." She narrowed her

eyes at him again as she said this and Harry nodded in firm agreement. "Good, we will start after the break with private sessions on Monday evenings after dinner, if that is agreeable."

"Yes! I'm mean, it is, yes of course," Harry said elatedly.

McGonagall smiled slightly. "Very well, I shall see you after break, Mr. Potter, and if you wish to obtain some theory beforehand, I will not object to you asking your godfather to give you a head start over break."

"Oh, I think I can convince him to come back during break for this."

McGonagall gave him a strange look. "Are you not going to his house for Christmas?"

"I've decided to stay here with Severus, and under the circumstances, it's probably safer for everyone that I remain inside the school."

"Circumstances?" questioned McGonagall.

Harry looked at his Head of House strangely. "Professor Dumbledore didn't tell you?"

"Didn't tell me what, Mr. Potter?"

"About the Prophecy, I thought for sure he would have told at least the Head of Houses," Harry answered, wondering why Dumbledore hadn't said a word. He thought that the Headmaster would have had them keeping an eye on him by now.

McGonagall shook her head. "What Prophecy?"

"He didn't tell you! That's rather careless of him, you really should know."

"Yes, please enlighten me, Harry."

So Harry told her, and when he was done, she stared at him for a moment and then got up from her desk and walked over to her

fireplace, staring into the fire in deep thought. Harry simply sat there, fidgeting. Suddenly she opened a box on her mantle and took something that glistened gold from inside and returned to her desk. She tossed the thing at Harry, who caught it without thought.

Harry held up the gold pendent that had a very familiar crest etched into it. He'd only seen the symbol once before, and that was on a tapestry in the room where he'd first learned he was a Protector. Harry looked back up to McGonagall with a question in his eyes, though he wasn't sure he could wrap his mind around the question.

"I too am a Protector of Hogwarts, Harry Potter." Harry's eyes widened and his mouth fell open. "I hope the Prophecy does not come true, for your sake. I will protect the school and the students in it if you turn against it."

"And I hope you will," Harry said seriously. "Does anyone else know about this?" he asked looking back down at the pendent and running his thumb over the etching.

"I've told no one. I wasn't going to tell you, but you deserve to know that there is someone else here if need be."

Harry looked back up at the woman. "Can you stop me, if I turn against the school?"

McGonagall frowned and then sighed. "I don't know, Harry. I've never had to use the powers of Protector. I've only ever used them to adjust the wards from time to time." McGonagall smirked slightly, "And to get around a bit quicker."

"You can Apparate within the wards?"

"Of course I can, how else do you suppose I get down to dinner before you do after Transfiguration?" McGonagall said with amusement in her voice.

"I always did wonder..." Harry said with a smirk of his own but then sobered. "I'm going to let you in on a little ongoing secret, but you have to promise that you won't interfere with it."

McGonagall looked at him shrewdly for a moment but then nodded. "All right, what is your secret?"

"I've started a study club in the Room of Requirement."

"Well that's hardly a secret worth keeping."

Harry smiled. "It's a school wide one. Almost every student in Hogwarts is involved in it; there are students from all houses and all years. We've been helping teach each other, improving ourselves in class work, in all subjects and we've even gone beyond the curriculum."

"How on earth are you housing all of them?" McGonagall asked.

"I turned the Room of Requirement into a room that is about as big as the Great Hall. Honestly, I think Hogwarts had a hand in it, you should see it. It's got everything, including its own personal library," Harry said proudly.

"How are you keeping all of this organized?"

"I'm not, the students are. Actually, I was going to start a defense club, but the students that showed up for the first meeting kind of took over the idea and expanded on it. They're all helping each other. I don't think I've ever seen the entire school so unified on one thing. It's remarkable," Harry explained with a distant look in his eyes.

"I must see this." McGonagall said as she stood.

"And you will, but first, there's a reason I told you." McGonagall sat back down. "Part of what the upper years have been learning is how defend this school if it should ever be attacked again. They've organized this, not me. I honestly wanted them to stay out of it, stay safe, but they won't be deterred. If I turn against the school, please, make sure they don't stand against me. I don't want to hurt anyone."

"Rest assured, Harry, I'll make sure they're safe against any threat."



Harry smiled slightly. He knew she would.

--

Harry watched as the last of the carriages filed off the Hogwarts grounds towards Hogsmeade Station, carrying with them all those going home for the Holidays. He very much wanted to go with his friends, but he was afraid to leave the protection of Hogwarts. With a heavy sigh, Harry turned from the front steps of the castle and walked back into the school.

"Why did you not leave with your friends?"

Harry looked up to Abiah, who was floating a few feet away. He'd been scarcely seen in the last few weeks. "Where have you been?" Harry asked instead of answering the ghost of his ancestor.

"Here and there," Abiah said nonchalantly.

"Where do you go when not at Hogwarts? I thought ghosts had to stay in one place, yet you've clearly been following me around, outside of Hogwarts."

"I am tied not to the school, but to my descendants on this earth. I can be where ever my blood connections are."

"Oh, so where do you go when you're not haunting me?" Harry asked.

"As I said, here and there, now are you going to answer my question?" Abiah asked.

Harry rolled his eyes. "I don't want to leave Hogwarts."

"Clearly," Abiah said dryly, but before Abiah could question him further, another voice interrupted.

"Harry, my boy, there you are," Dumbledore said with a smile and then his eyes traveled over to the ghost, floating at Harry's side. "Abiah Slytherin, is it?" Abiah nodded. "What a marvelous

coincidence, I have needed to speak with you. Harry, do you mind if I borrow your ancestor for a bit?"

Harry shrugged. "If you want, I'm going to go bother Severus; I'll be in his office."

"Excellent, I shall be down when I'm through here."

Harry nodded and then watched as the Headmaster and ghost wandered off. Harry didn't know what the two were going to talk about, but he knew he would be a big part of their discussion, wasn't he always? Harry made his way to Severus' office and was about to knock, when he held his hand back at the voices he could hear inside, he carefully placed his ear to the door.

"He's not going to like you for this," Sirius stated.

"I know, and I'm certain he's going to throw a right fit, but it's for his own good," Severus said firmly.

Harry could hear shuffling of papers and opening and closing of drawers. Severus was organizing. The man wasn't aware of it, but he organized when he was nervous or was trying to find a way to say something that other people didn't want to hear, he only did that with those people he cared about.

"He's not doing well, Sirius," Severus continued. "He's not sleeping. He's been wearing a strong glamour for the last few weeks to hide that fact. His memory is deteriorating, he's forgetting important things now, not just the little things, and he refuses to see Poppy about it. Albus is worried that he's going to have a nervous breakdown."

"Is he cutting himself again?" Sirius asked with worry in his voice.

"I don't believe so, but I got a letter from the ministry, from the legal department about some stipulations Harry wrote into his adoption papers," Severus said.

"What kind of stipulations, he wouldn't put in anything against —"

“Not against me, but himself. He’s allowing me, as his guardian, to put a full block on his magic, not even a blood parent has the legal rights to do that to their children. He’s also allowed me to strip him of his magical inheritance, everything he has inherited from his parents, not just the money. I believe he is trying to prevent himself from turning against the school. He’s blocking himself from all possibilities, magic, money, artifacts...”

“And in doing so, he’s blocking himself from any possible future,” Sirius added heavily.

Severus sighed. “He doesn’t want a future, should he turn against us, and I can understand that, but he’d never do it willingly, and he’s only hurting himself in the process.”

“So Christmas Eve?” asked Sirius after a few moments of silence.

“I’ll do it Christmas Eve.”

Harry stepped away from the door and ran a shaky hand through his hair. He hadn’t realized that anyone had noticed what was happening to him and now they were conspiring against him. For his own good. Harry had heard that phrase too many times in his life. Everything was always for his own good, and it never turned out good for him at all. Harry debated going into the office and confronting them, but he shook his head and walked away instead. He needed some time to think over what he’d heard.

He walked the corridors for a while. The school was so calm during the holidays, so quiet, peaceful. So unlike his thoughts at the moment, that were actually making him slightly dizzy with the way they were swirling around his mind, never really settling on one thing. There was just so much to think about, so much to worry about.

Severus was correct he’d not been sleeping, a couple of hours here and there, when he couldn’t stay awake any longer, but little else. He was exhausted; he was scared of what might be coming. The last time he’d fallen to Voldemort he’d near lost his mind. Those memories haunted him during his sleep, and everything else haunted him when he was awake. He didn’t know how much more he could

take and he wished that he'd never heard the rest of the prophecy, if he could he'd Obliviate it from his mind, but he couldn't.

Harry stopped and stared down the empty corridor for a moment and then turned on his heel and made his way to Myrtle's bathroom. He walked in and was just about to hiss open the passage when he remembered his promise to tell someone if he was going to be in the Chamber. He stared at the tap. He really didn't want to have to go find some.

"Open," he hissed and then walked down into the Chamber. He wouldn't be long; he only wanted to talk to Mortedolv.

Harry was about halfway to the Chamber when Mortedolv suddenly came out of a tunnel. Harry not expecting it nearly screamed and jumped back and then fell to his knees, breathing heavily, with his head in his hands.

"Are you all right, Harry," Mortedolv asked. "I had not meant to scare you."

Harry looked up at the Basilisk. "I'm fine; Mort, but you nearly gave me heart attack."

"I am sorry, Harry," Mortedolv hissed worriedly. "I had not meant to attack your heart."

Harry chuckled and shook his head. "It's all right," he said as he stood back up, but then quickly leaned on the wall as the room tilted a bit. Harry shook his head again as the moment passed.

"Are you sure you are all right?" Mortedolv questioned.

Harry nodded. "Yes, I'm just really tired."

"You should be sleeping then," Mortedolv advised.

"You are right, I should be," Harry hissed.

"Come, you can rest in Salazar's Chamber," Mortedolv stated and then practically ushered Harry down the tunnel.

Harry rolled his eyes as he walked. Perhaps he would sleep better here. Inside of Hogwarts, only he and Mortedolv had access to the chamber, if he was to feel safe anywhere, here would be it.

"They are conspiring against me, Mort," Harry said morosely as he followed the Basilisk.

"Who, Harry?" Mortedolv asked.

"Sirius and Severus," Harry answered. "They are planning something for Christmas Eve."

"Do you wish for me to bite them?"

Harry smiled. "No. I wish for them to stop planning things for me behind my back. I feel as if I'm fifteen again and stuck outside of the Order meetings, not knowing half of what is going on. I don't like not knowing what is coming."

"You do not like being normal?" Mortedolv asked as they entered into Salazar's Chamber. Harry stared at the Basilisk oddly. "You have become used to knowing what is on the horizon, young heir. You have had your memories to guide you, but now you no longer do. You are the same as everyone else now, unaware of your own future."

"But I know my future," Harry said quietly.

"Do you?"

"I'm going to fall to Voldemort," Harry whispered, looking away from Mortedolv. "I'm going to turn on the school and I'm going to kill him."

"And then what?"

Harry looked back up to the serpent. "I don't know."

--

A/N: Sorry for the delay, I had thought I'd posted this a while ago, silly me. But here it is now.

## Chapter Forty-Seven – Merry Christmas

It was odd, Harry had spent so much time over the last weeks worrying about what was coming, that he'd not given much thought about what would happen after the Prophecy was fulfilled. This of course just gave him more to worry about. He was sure that wasn't Mort's intention, but nonetheless, it was another thing to settle into the unmanageable tangle of thoughts that was his mind.

He still had a deal with Death. The Prophecy mentioned that Death would release him from his obligation, but he couldn't see Death giving him up that easily either. He didn't know what to think about that. On some level he almost hoped Death would take him, and truth be told, Severus had been correct when he'd said that he didn't want a future if he was forced to turn on them. He wouldn't be able to live with that, especially if he ended up hurting any of them, or worse, killing any of them. It was part of the reason why he'd written all of the stipulations into his adoption papers.

Harry was still in the Chamber. It had been hours since he'd disappeared down into the underground cavern, and he knew he should go back up. They were probably panicking about his whereabouts by now, but he'd not been able to summon the energy to move from the chair he'd settled into, in front of the roaring fireplace. Mortedolv was dozing in a large coil nearby, and Harry had tried to sleep some himself, but his mind just wouldn't allow him to, no matter how exhausted his body was.

He closed his eyes for the hundredth time, trying to clear his thoughts. He winced and rubbed at his temples as a spiking pain shot through his head, slowly developing into a dull throb until Harry stopped trying altogether and the pain ebbed away.

It was ironic. Occlumency had been so hard for him to learn in his fifth year, when it really mattered. He couldn't grasp the concept of clearing one's mind, but now he wished more than anything that he could do just that. He could then, never truly close his mind, organize his thoughts and memories enough to master the skill. He'd forced himself to master it when he'd come back, not just because he didn't want Voldemort in his head, but because it gave him a sense of calm

when he was able to clear his mind completely. Occlumency had allowed him to think clearly, even during extreme situations, and now, even attempting it gave him a headache.

He'd been having this problem off and on since the attack on the school, but it had been getting steadily worse. He knew he should mention it to Severus, but every time he thought he'd had the opportunity to bring it up, something else sprung into the way. And he was beginning to suspect it might have something to do with his memory problems as well.

His memory had been starting to improve from the numerous times he'd been hit with the Cruciatus Curse, before the attack. The special Occlumency technique had helped a lot with that, but Harry was beginning to believe that he was slowly losing his mind, and he wondered if anyone had ever been hit with the Cruciatus Curse as much as he had and still been able to call themselves sane. He didn't think so.

"It's not as if I care about what the living think anymore," a bored sounding voice suddenly sounded from behind Harry, causing him to jump and Mort to look up, slightly startled as well. Harry spun around in his seat. "But I'm getting really annoyed with them asking me over and over if I've seen you, Harry," Myrtle said with an exaggerated sigh.

"Myrtle, how'd you get down here?" Harry asked, standing up and blinking at the ghost.

"Abiah let me in before he disappeared to wherever he goes floating off to. He couldn't open the Chamber completely because he's a ghost and all, but he did open the way through the wards that Salazar put up to keep ghosts out. I wonder if he can do that to Sibyls' tower, we've been wondering what it looks like up there now that old Deacon doesn't haunt the tower anymore," Myrtle rambled as Harry and Mort both stared at her, Mortedolv for an entirely different reason than Harry. "Oh, Harry, did you know the thing that killed me is sitting behind you?"



Harry looked from Myrtle to Mort and then back at Myrtle again. "Umm, yeah about that, he's my friend, Myrtle," Harry said, wondering what the ghost's reaction was going to be.

Myrtle surprised Harry and shrugged nonchalantly and then floated over the Basilisk and kissed him on the nose, well as much as a ghost can actually kiss anything. Myrtle smiled at Mort, who just sat there silently staring at her and then floated back to Harry's side.

"Please, Harry, leave the Chamber, I want my toilet back to the peace and quiet I had before," Myrtle pouted and Harry couldn't help but give into her request and nodded, it was either that or laugh in her face, and he was sure that wouldn't go over too well.

"Mort, I'm leaving the Chamber, every ones starting to look for me," Harry announced, turning to the dumbstruck Basilisk.

Mortedolv looked back at Harry. "She is the girl I killed," he stated, Harry nodded uneasily. "I was not aware she had become a ghost. Tell her I apologize."

Harry quirked an eyebrow, but then turned back to Myrtle. "Mortedolv says he's sorry about killing you," Harry said uncertainly.

"Tell him I accept his apology and I don't blame him." Harry looked back at Mort and relayed the message.

"She says she accepts your apology and doesn't blame you," Harry said quickly. It was a little awkward being the translator between a Basilisk and a ghost, especially because it was Mort and Myrtle. Mort seemed to relax some and nodded at the ghost. Myrtle smiled and then waved to the both of them and then floated up through the ceiling. "I'm just going to go now..." he said uncomfortably and then quickly left the Chamber. Harry was certain that Mortedolv was smirking behind him.

A short time later, Harry was just climbing out of the Chamber of Secrets when he was accosted by several very irritated professors all at once. Perhaps he should have told someone where he was going.

“Harry, we discussed this...”

“Do you have any idea how long we’ve been looking for you...”

“I can understand your need to get away at times, but...”

“You made a promise to me, how are we to trust you if you can not adhere to a simple agreement?” Dumbledore said seriously over the others, and Harry stepped the rest of the way out of the Chamber, letting it close behind him.

“I know, and I’m sorry, Professor. I wasn’t thinking clearly... I’m still not,” Harry said with a sigh, looking at his feet.

“Are you all right, Harry?” Severus asked with concern in his voice.

“GO AWAY!” Myrtle suddenly interrupted. “All I want is to enjoy my death in solitude. No one else bothers me, why do you have to!” she shouted and then broke down into sobs. The four Professors all looked startled at the ghost.

“I’m sorry, Myrtle,” Harry apologized, wincing at the high-pitched wale she let out before she dived into the nearest toilet. “Yeah, umm, let’s take this elsewhere,” Harry suggested tentatively and then left the bathroom and the four wizards staring at where Myrtle had just disappeared.

He’d just stepped out into the hall when Draco came around the corner and then jogged up to him when he spotted him. “Potter, there you are. Do you realize how disagreeable the portrait that guards your common room is? The barmy woman kept yelling at me for knocking on the portrait frame. Honestly how else does she expect me to get in, if not to knock and hope whoever answers doesn’t curse me on sight? Does she realize that I was putting myself in personal risk just by being polite enough to knock?”

Harry smirked slightly. “She can be a bit disagreeable, especially when you forget the password. I stopped trying to knock a month ago just to save my ears and she knows I’m a Gryffindor.”

Draco nodded, looking as if he was feeling a bit less slighted at that. "Anyway, there are a few younger year Slytherins staying for the holidays and they were wondering if you could show them the Patronus Charm again..." he trailed off as Dumbledore, Sirius, Remus, and Severus all came out of the girls bathroom behind Harry.

Harry couldn't help but burst into laughter at the look on Draco's face as he stared at the four and they stared back. Draco had a cross between shock, disgust and curiosity written across his face, and Harry wondered what the others were going to come up with as an excuse, as Draco certainly didn't know about the Chamber of Secrets.

"I don't mean to be rude, but did you know that you all just came out of a girl's lavatory?" Draco asked rather seriously.

The four men exchanged a look. "Did we now?" Dumbledore asked.

"Yes, Mister Malfoy, we were quite aware. We were just checking the plumbing, had quite a few floods over the years, and..." Remus started

"And it's a preemptive strike against another one," Sirius added. "You never know when those Weasley twins will set off their next prank on some poor unsuspecting little girl trying to..."

Severus simply stared with a raised eyes brow as the others tried to explain and Harry was having a hard time catching his breath, he was laughing so hard. Draco looked at him strangely.

"Now what's this about the Patronus Charm, my boys?" Dumbledore asked, effectively changing the subject.

Harry's laugh caught in his throat. "Oh!" he squeaked. "Nothing really, I was only showing a couple students just before break how to cast the Charm. I few people asked how I could cast it and all..."

"Yes, and I'm one of them!" Draco jumped in. "Absolutely fascinating piece of magic, don't you agree Professor?" Draco asked Severus who nodded in amusement.

"It certainly is Mister Malfoy."

"Where were you practicing this? If you would like I can have Filius open his classroom up for your use, maybe even assist you in your endeavor, Harry," Dumbledore offered graciously.

"That's all right, Professor, we've been using..." Harry looked between Severus, Remus, and Sirius for a moment, trying to decide who's room would be more suited. "Sirius' classroom," he finished. "Remus has offered to assist if we get stuck."

Dumbledore smiled and looked at the two and they nodded uncertainly. Harry chuckled lightly. He was just now beginning to realize why he tried not to keep things from people too often. It could be a right mess trying to keep secrets.

--

Harry sat down across from Dumbledore and next to Severus at the table that was set up for the staff and students left at Hogwarts. It was Christmas Eve and Harry was waiting for whatever Severus had planned for him. He knew it wasn't going to be something horrible. Severus would never do anything to hurt him, but he was a bit concerned as to what exactly it was.

Mort, who was currently shrunk, hidden, and wrapped around him inside his robes, had promised to bite Severus if he ended up spending Christmas in the Hospital Wing though, and that made Harry feel marginally better. Of course, the serpent had also declared that if whatever Severus had planned was in Harry's best interest, then he wouldn't interfere. Harry had almost left the Basilisk in the Chamber for that, but Mortdolv had really wanted to see what Christmas was all about, and he'd looked so hopeful and adorable all shrunk the way he was, that Harry couldn't leave him.

So Harry sat, waiting suspiciously, as he ate his dinner cautiously. So far, nothing tasted off, but he also knew of many a potion that was tasteless, colorless, and odorless. He reached for his goblet and inspected it the way he inspected everything else before he'd consumed it. He was turning into Moody and Severus was obviously

thinking this himself as he kept looking over at Harry oddly every time he carefully scrutinized anything. Harry supposed it didn't help that he glared at Severus every time he did.

Harry took a small sip from his goblet and then waited. Satisfied that nothing had happened to him yet, he took a larger gulp. "I've not put anything in your food," Severus said quietly and Harry nearly spit his pumpkin juice out, before he managed to swallow it.

He looked at Severus with mock innocents. "And why would you believe that I think you put something in my food?" Severus simply raised an eyebrow. "I know you and Sirius have something planned for tonight. I don't know what it is, but I just want you to know that I don't appreciate you two conspiring against me," Harry said quietly.

"We aren't conspiring against you," Severus said calmly. Harry narrowed his eyes at the man. "Besides, you won't be finding anything in your food, but nutrients, so you might as well eat normally."

Harry glared at Severus for another moment and then went back to eating; it was a fine fare after all. There was about twelve students at the school this year, including Draco. Harry knew all of them from the Club and he had been helping them all with their Patronus Charms for the last couple days, as they'd all managed to brave the Gryffindor Portrait to ask him for his help, well with the exception of the one third year Gryffindor, who kept helpfully reminding Harry of the password. Harry really didn't know what he'd do without him.

They were all coming along rather well, and he wouldn't be surprised if even the second year Hufflepuff was able to make a Corporeal Patronus by the end of the break. Up against a Dementor was another story, however. Harry still hadn't figured out how to get a hold of something that produced similar effects. After all, his Boggart was no longer a Dementor and Remus, Severus, and Sirius didn't have any suggestions.

It wasn't long before dinner was finished and dessert was laid out, along with it, hot cocoa and spiced hot apple cider. Harry loved the house elves, really he did. He was just finishing his second cup of hot

cocoa, and chatting with Draco next to him, when he suddenly yawned very tiredly. He wasn't surprised by this after the feast that they had just had, and he was rather tired, but it had come on awfully abruptly... He swung around to face Severus with murder in his eyes.

"Your hot chocolate on the other hand..." Severus said with a small smirk and then promptly caught his son as he abruptly fell into dreamland. "Perhaps I gave him a tad too much," he muttered, readjusting his hold on the boy slumped against him as Draco sniggered into his cider.

Dumbledore chuckled as he stood. "I'll be by tomorrow morning, if only so I can see the fallout to this little manipulation. Goodnight all, and Merry Christmas," he said and then left the hall. Everyone else at the table looked at the now peacefully sleeping Harry in bewilderment.

--

Harry awoke with a huge yawn and feeling for the first time in weeks as if he were fully rested. It was too bad that it had to be potion induced. Harry sat up and knew exactly where he was before he even took a look around the darkened room, Grimmauld Place. He supposed that it was too much that they would respect his wishes.

He wasn't at all happy about being here. In fact, he was rather nervous about it, and he was downright annoyed that Severus had the audacity to put a sleeping potion in his hot cocoa, but there wasn't much he could do about it, if this is where they wanted him to be. Harry contemplated throwing a hissy fit for a moment or two, and ranting like a two year old, but then he was over it. It was Christmas after all, and he was here now, he might as well enjoy himself as best he could.

Harry got out of bed quietly, as not to disturb Ron, still asleep in the bed across from him, and finding his trunk at the end of his bed, he pulled out a set of nice looking clothes. They weren't too dressy, but nothing had holes in it. He took his clothes and toiletries out of the room with him, determined to make use of the first shower of the day. He may even use up all of the hot water, or at least magically make

sure it was cold after he used it. After all, what's life without a little bit of revenge on those he cared most about?

Almost an hour later, Harry returned to the room he was sharing with Ron. His friend was still sound asleep, but Harry wasn't surprised by this, it was just five thirty in the morning. After putting away his things, he gently picked up Mort, who he found curled up on his pillow, and made his way out of the bedroom and down to the kitchen.

The house was very quiet and no one was in the kitchen when he entered. He set Mort on the kitchen table. The tiny Basilisk looked around curiously. "I have not been away from Hogwarts since I was a hatchling. This place is as dreary as my chamber."

Harry laughed. "It could do with a little redecorating, but it's functional. I wonder what Mrs. Weasley has planned for breakfast?"

"I'll assume that was a rhetorical question, as I have no way of answering it."

Harry only nodded and then went cupboard shopping. There were an array of items to choose from and more than enough to whip up a Christmas Breakfast Feast. He assumed Mrs. Weasley was going to do just that, but wouldn't it be a surprise for her to wake up and have it all done?

Harry set to work. He liked working in the kitchen, and he was fairly good at it. Out of necessity really, but at least he'd have one career if Severus had to bind his magic. Mort was correct. He had a future ahead of him, even if there was a bleak spot between now and then. He didn't know what it was going to hold. It could be absolutely horrible. But maybe, just maybe, it wouldn't be.

By the time the first early risers had made it down to the kitchen, Harry had everything finished and set out under respective cooling and warming charms, all done wandlessly. Mort was curled around his neck and shoulders and Harry was reading through the Christmas addition of the Daily Prophet that a post owl had delivered, and listening to Christmas carols on the Wizarding Wireless Network.

The three men stopped dead in their tracks in the doorway, and stared at the table and then Harry. Harry set aside the paper. "Merry Christmas!" he said joyfully standing from his seat.

"What did you do to my godson?" Sirius asked Severus. Severus simply shook his head in silence as Remus stared at Harry and the table. Mrs. Weasley, obviously impatient for the men to move, pushed passed the three bewildered Wizards.

"Harry, Merry Christmas, I'm so glad you are here. Did you do all of this by yourself?"

Harry nodded with a smile. "You shouldn't have to do all the cooking all the time, Mrs. Weasley. Think of it as a Christmas present, everyone deserves a day off at least once a year."

"Harry, thank you, and it all looks so wonderful!" Mrs. Weasley rushed over and hugged him, nervously petting the serpent contently hanging around Harry's shoulders as she pulled away. She'd obviously heard about Mortedolv.

"I didn't know you could cook," Sirius said, still bewildered.

Harry nodded. "Yes, quite well I think. I can also make a variety of potions in the time it takes to make all of this," he said with an innocent smile, waving his hand over the assortment of food. Sirius and Severus glanced nervously at each other. "But I wouldn't put anything into your food or drink. That would be underhanded and sneaky. Downright Slytherin of me really," Harry added innocently as he pet Mort. The two men could swear that they saw the shrunken Basilisk grinning at them.

They were interrupted by the rest of the household barreling down the stairs at the smell of breakfast, and were forced out of the way by several red heads and a brunette. "Harry! I thought you weren't going to be here, you should have told us," Hermione said as she hugged him and then pet Mort affectionately. The Basilisk had grown on her since their first meeting.

"I didn't know, Merry Christmas!" Harry said with a laugh.



"Merry Christmas, Harry!" exclaimed Ron. "Did you make all this?" Harry nodded and Ron dove in without even questioning it. Everyone else started to tuck in as well, though Severus and Sirius did so cautiously.

Harry looked around happily and then he remembered the shower and realized that not everyone deserved an ice cold shower, as quite obviously not everyone knew he was going to be here. He pulled Hermione down so her ear was level to his mouth, while everyone else was giving Merry Christmases and exclaiming over how good the food was.

"Tell everyone but Severus, Sirius and possibly Remus that I put a freezing charm on the shower heads this morning," he whispered.

Hermione snorted and then nodded. "So what did they do to get you here?" she asked loudly, which gained everyone's attention.

"Apparently, Severus thought it would be awfully nice for me to have a good, long nights sleep and in true Slytherin fashion, slipped a sleeping potion into my hot cocoa," Harry said with a small glare in the man's direction.

"I told you to ask him to come to Christmas, not knock him out and drag him here!" Mrs. Weasley exclaimed and the two men actually ducked.

"It was his idea," Sirius and Severus pointed at Remus.

Remus sat there staring at the two with his mouth agape. "I had absolutely nothing to do with it. I only caught him when he came through the Floo."

"Meaning he knew," Harry said on side to Ginny, sitting on his other side.

"I think the three of you are in hot water, Professors," Ginny said helpfully and with an amused smile.

"More like ice cold," Hermione muttered to Ron who looked at her funny and Harry smirked, taking a sip of his orange juice. It was certainly going to be a very Merry Christmas.

--

"This is an odd sort of dwelling," Mortedolv commented, as Harry walked through the halls towards the library. "I do not believe I would be able to fit in these corridors, at my full size."

"Probably why you were kept at a castle, much more space, but at least the house isn't over run with Order members. Even you, shrunken, would have found it crowded if you were here during summer break."

"How did you manage?"

Harry smirked. "I didn't. I stormed an Order meeting and demanded more space. I think they laughed at me afterwards." Mort hissed in his way of laughter.

Harry was about to enter the library when he heard voices inside and stopped. Why was it that he kept finding himself eaves dropping on conversations? And why did they always have to revolve around him? And why did he always have to stop and listen? Harry was about to open the door and let them know of his presence, but held back and frowned at the topic of conversation.

"I'm not saying that Harry is unstable, Severus, I'm only afraid that he's reached his limit," Dumbledore said heavily.

"He seemed fine at Christmas, happy even," Remus commented. "He didn't even put up a fight about being brought here. You saw him, he was very chipper, and even made everyone breakfast. I half expected for him to lock himself in his room and yell at us through the door that we were carelessly tempting Fate with taking him from Hogwarts."

"And his only revenge was ice cold showers for a couple of days," Sirius said with a laugh. "I think we got off easy."

“Exactly,” Dumbledore stated. “When have you ever known Harry to just give in without a fight? His mood shifted too drastically, for such a short amount of time.”

“What are you saying, Albus, that there’s something wrong with him?” Severus asked worriedly.

“It pains me to say this, but I believe if he continues as he is that he will not only become a danger to himself, but to others around him.”

“Then what do you suggest we do, Albus?” Sirius asked. “We’ve tried everything. We’ve tried to get him to talk to us; we’ve tried to take his mind of the Prophecy. I don’t know what else we can do. You know he doesn’t want to put anyone in danger...”

“I suggest...”

“Albus?” prompted Severus when he didn’t continue.

“I suggest that we not allow him to return to Hogwarts,” Dumbledore answered solemnly.

--

A/N: Okay, I know a mini cliffhanger, but I’ll try to have the next chapter out very soon.

## Chapter Forty-Eight - Escape

Harry's hands slowly curled into fists at his sides as he stared at the door with cold eyes. He itched to throw open the door and demand to know what Dumbledore was playing at. The Headmaster knew Harry was only safe at Hogwarts. The school was protecting him, as much as he was protecting the school.

"Harry, my understanding of your language is limited, but you are agitated, what is wrong?" Mortedolv questioned.

"They are expelling me, Mort. The headmaster isn't allowing me to return to Hogwarts!" Harry hissed back half in panic, half in anger, his voice shaking as his breath hitched.

"They cannot do that. You are Protector of Hogwarts. You belong there!" Mortedolv hissed irately.

Harry lowered his shaking hand that was about to open the library door and turned on his heel and quickly stormed back down the hall. He would return to Hogwarts before they had a chance to tell him, and lock himself in the Chamber if that is what it would take to keep him at the school.

He reached the kitchen in record time and started frantically searching the canisters and jars that lined the mantle, heedless to the pair who were sitting at the table. He threw a glass jar down in frustration when he couldn't find what he was looking for. It shattered into a hundred tiny pieces and the small stones in it scattered across the floor. Harry put his head in hand and leaned against the mantle. The hand supporting him clutched so fiercely at the wooden shelf that his knuckles were white.

"Whoa, I'm pretty sure that jar didn't do anything to you," George joked quietly, standing from the table. "What's going on, Harry?" he asked seriously, when Harry didn't respond.

Harry took a deep breath in and then another until he was sure he was calm enough to say anything. "Nothing, George, where does

Sirius keep the Floo Powder?" he asked in a strained, but even voice as he stared into the fireplace.

"The Floo is locked until we go back, you know this," Ginny said. "Harry, are you all right?" she asked when he still didn't turn around.

Harry didn't look up as he spoke. "No, I am not," he hissed through clenched teeth as he tried to get control over his emotions. Mort hissed in agitation and Harry knew he was starting to panic and he was angry, angrier than he'd been through his own emotions in a long time. He needed to get back to Hogwarts before he did something rash, like curse the Headmaster into oblivion.

"Harry, what's wrong?" Ginny asked, taking a cautious step towards him.

Harry suddenly spun back around. "Everything is wrong! This whole fucking world is wrong!" he shouted. "They are expelling me!" his voice cracked as he said the last.

"What?" George asked in shock. "Why would they do that?"

"They think I'm a danger to everyone around me!" Harry nearly growled as he ran his hand through his hair anxiously.

"But that's not true!" Ginny defended. "How can they think that? You've saved us all so many times. How can they even consider you being a danger!"

"Hey, what's going on?" Ron asked as he, Hermione, and Fred came into the kitchen.

"They're expelling him," George answered.

"What!" Hermione exclaimed.

"When did you find that out?" Ron asked almost at the same time.

Harry collapsed into a chair at the table. "I was upstairs about to go into the library when I heard them talking about me. Dumbledore

suggested that I not be allowed to return to Hogwarts,” he said heavily.

“Why?” Fred asked.

“They think he’s a danger to everyone,” Ginny supplied lightly.

“Well they can’t do that!” Hermione stated firmly. “You belong at Hogwarts, it’s your home. If we just talk to him...”

“He seemed pretty resolute on it, Hermione,” Harry said tiredly.

“Well, we’re just going to have to get you back there before they can tell you,” Ron stated. “Where’s the Floo powder?”

“The Floo is locked Ron, remember,” Ginny said quietly, sitting down next to Harry.

“Oh, right, umm... what about Apparating?” Ron suggested.

“Ron, you’re brilliant!” Hermione exclaimed.

“I am?” Ron asked skeptically and then shook his head. “Of course I am, always knew that,” he stated.

Harry snorted, but then sobered. “One flaw with that, I don’t have an Apparating license and I’ve already gotten in trouble with the Ministry for Apparating before.”

“It’s an emergency! We’ll deal with the consequences later!” Hermione said emphatically.

“First you yell at the Headmaster, and now you’re condoning breaking laws. What’s next, Hermione, skipping class?” Ron asked with a sly smirk.

“Of course not, why would I ever do a thing like that?” she asked appalled at the very idea and everyone laughed, breaking the tension slightly, until they all heard footsteps from above them. “Harry, you

have to get out of here!" Hermione exclaimed and then pulled Harry to his feet and pushed him towards the door.

Harry hesitated in the hall. He really didn't want to cause more problems for himself. Ron shoved him towards the stairs and before he had a chance to really think about it further, his friends were all ushering him towards the front door.

The portrait of Mrs. Black started screaming rudely at the raucous the group was causing and Mrs. Weasley stopped on the stairs at the sight. "What in Merlin's name are you children doing?" she said loudly over Mrs. Black's screeching.

The door above her that led to the library opened and Sirius, Severus, Remus, and Dumbledore came out at all the noise with rather startled expressions on their faces. The group froze, looking up at them.

"What is going on?" Sirius asked, baffled.

Suddenly Ron, Fred, and George all pushed Harry towards the door. "Run, Harry!" they exclaimed and Harry took off and was out the door before anyone had a chance to react.

"Harry!" Severus' yell was muffled by the slamming of the door.

Harry ran down the stoop and into the street and then concentrated. He and Mort disappeared with a loud crack not a moment later.

Severus ran passed the youths and threw open the door, but Harry was gone. He turned on his heel and walked the couple paces to tower over the now clearly terrified students, as Remus and Sirius tried to put a stop to Mrs. Blacks ranting. "Explanation, now!" he growled.

Hermione squared her shoulders. "You can't expel him! He's done nothing wrong!"

"Expel, where would you ever get an idea like...?" Severus stopped his question and then turned his glare on Dumbledore. "He must of overheard," he stated with a sneer. The old man pinched the bridge

of his nose under his glasses. "We had no intention of expelling him, Miss Granger. Professor Dumbledore was simply making a suggestion that we – I would never agree to," Severus said firmly. "Where did he go?"

"Back to Hogwarts, Sir," Ron answered, looking at his feet.

Severus nodded and then looked up to Dumbledore. "I'll go and make sure he arrived safely. Sirius, if you would gather his things, I'm sure he'll refuse to come back. I only hope he hasn't locked himself in the Chamber yet." With that said, Severus turned on his heel again and left the house.

"Chamber?" asked Fred once Snape was gone.

"That wouldn't happen to be The Chamber," George began.

"Of Secrets?" finished Fred.

Sirius, Remus, Dumbledore, Hermione, and Ron froze at the question and all eyed each other. "Oh come on, where else could Harry get a miniature Basilisk from," Ginny said and then walked back down the stairs and into the kitchen. The others simply stared after her.

"She's rather perceptive," Dumbledore pointed out.

Mrs. Weasley smiled. "How could you ever doubt it, she is my daughter."

--

Harry landed in front of the open gates of Hogwarts. He took several steps forward before the world spun and his legs suddenly gave out from underneath him and he crashed to the wintered ground and looked around disoriented.

"Harry, what is wrong?" Mort hissed urgently, unraveling himself from around Harry so he could look him over.



Harry blinked at the serpent in confusion, before he slowly pushed himself back up and shook his head. "I don't know," he whispered and then shook his head again and looked back up at the school blankly. His eyes widened. "I did it, I escaped!"

"Harry!"

Harry turned his head at the call of his name and then scrambled to his feet and raised his hand, that started to glow a golden color as he slowly backed away. "Snape!" he growled out in shock.

"Harry, I know you're upset, but you must believe me, I would never have allowed you to be expelled," Severus said gently, raising his hands in a placating manner. "Please lower your hand."

"What?" Harry shook his head in confusion and clenched his hands into fists. "No, he's messing with my head again!" he hissed and then backed away. "Riddle, what's the point of this one! Make me think I escaped and throw dead people at me! You know I won't believe it so why do you even bother trying!" Harry screamed.

"Harry? What are you talking about, you're free of your connection with Voldemort," Severus said uncertainly.

"Ha, like I'm going to believe that one..." Harry suddenly clasped the back of his neck. "That didn't hurt."

"Of course it didn't, Harry, you overcame that curse a long time ago. I think you're having lapses in memory again," Severus said softly with concern in his voice as he took a step towards Harry. "Please, let me take you to Poppy."

Harry took an edgy step back and shook his head. "No, Madame Pomfrey is dead! So are you! Get out of my head, Riddle!"

"Merlin," Severus whispered. "Harry, what is the last thing you remember?" he asked worriedly.

"What kind of question..." Harry narrowed his eyes. "All right, Riddle, I'll play along, but you're still not going to get the location of your last

Horcrux out of me!" Harry yelled to no one around him and then looked back at Snape. "Being captured and tortured day and night," he answered snidely.

"Harry, you were rescued and..."

A crack sounded behind Severus and he turned in time to see Sirius appear. "Oh good you found him, Severus," Sirius said with a small smile.

"Sirius?" whispered Harry and he took another step away.

Severus turned back. "Harry, I know what you believe right now, but your memories are incomplete."

Harry laughed harshly and looked to the sky. "Honestly, Riddle, I know he's dead! It didn't work with Ron and Hermione, what makes you think it will work with him?" Harry bellowed.

"Severus, what is going on?" Sirius asked.

"He doesn't remember a thing past being captured by Voldemort. He still thinks he's there and Voldemort's playing mind games," Severus answered quietly. "Harry, you aren't a prisoner of Voldemort anymore," he tried to reason, but Harry simply glared at him.

"I will tell you nothing, Riddle!"

"Harry, if you were still a prisoner of Voldemort, would he let you get away with you calling him Riddle, even in your head?" questioned Severus. "No, he wouldn't," Severus answered for him. "He would have cast the Cruciatus Curse on you by now, or something worse." Harry took another step back, but looked to be thinking that over. "And if we were in your mind, would I be calling him Voldemort or the Dark Lord?"

Harry shook his head and backed another step up. "If I really am free, how did I escape?" he asked with narrowed eyes.

Severus and Sirius shared a look. "You didn't escape," Severus answered. "Remus, he rescued you, remember. He thought you were dead at first..."

He was hanging limply from dirty rusting chains that held him up against a grimy stonewall. He'd been in and out of consciousness for what he assumed to be the last day at least. He wasn't sure what had brought him back this time, but he just wished that his body would give up already, he was so tired. And if his body gave up, he wouldn't have to die from Riddle's hand.

The familiar sound of the bolt sliding, sounded loudly outside of his cell and cut through the silence that was Harry's prison. He didn't bother to look up, he didn't think he had the strength to anyways; they were probably there to see if he had died yet and with a small spark of sadistic amusement, he wondered what they'd do when they realized he was still alive.

"My God, we're too late..." a voice whispered.

Harry's mind raced into overdrive, it couldn't be who he thought it was, there was no way he'd be able to get into Riddle's headquarters without being killed, but... But Harry still had a spark of hope and he weakly forced himself to lift his head, it wasn't much and his head fell back down immediately, but it let the man know that he was still among the living.

"I don't believe it, Alastor!" Remus shouted as he ran across the cell.

"Remus," Harry croaked out in a harsh whisper, through his raw, cracked, and chapped lips as he forced his head up again. Hope radiated off of him for the first time in days at the sight of the old scarred wizard coming into his cell behind Remus. "Is it r-really you?"

"It's really me, Harry," Remus assured, looking Harry over with horror in his eyes.

That was when Harry finally let himself cry, sob really. The entire time with Voldemort, through all the torture and mind games, not a single tear had escaped him. Sure he had screamed, screamed until he had

no voice left and amazingly screamed some more, but not once did he give the bastard the satisfaction of seeing him cry. But now he couldn't hold back.

"Remus, hold him while I get him out of these chains," Moody said gruffly.

Harry cried out in pain as his useless, broken arms were released and fell limp to his sides. He couldn't care less that he was being supported as he didn't have the strength to stand, let alone support himself. He was just happy that they had finally come to rescue him, though he briefly wondered why it had taken them so long.

"Let's get him out of here," Remus said softly and he felt an object being put into his scarred broken hand.

Harry barely felt the effects of the Portkey or Remus stumble slightly on landing, but he did hear the all too loud screech of Ginny Weasley come from across the Hogwarts infirmary. That was when Harry finally let himself pass out. He was home, he was safe. Nothing else mattered...

Harry stumbled back. "I remember, they rescued me and... Ginny..." A tear slid down Harry's cheek as he closed his eyes against the memory. Suddenly his eyes snapped open. "I died!"

"Yes, Harry," Sirius said somberly.

"Oh, Merlin, Sirius, what's happening to me?" he whispered falling to his knees.

"We don't know. Let's get you to, Poppy, hopefully she can tell us what's happening," Severus said, walking forward and pulling Harry to his feet. Harry could only nod and allow Severus to lead him up to the school in his confusion.

--

Madam Pomfrey came out from behind the curtain Harry was on the other side of with a perturbed look on her face. Severus and Sirius both jumped up when they saw her.

"Well, what's wrong with him?" Sirius asked when the Medi-Witch just continued to glare at him.

"How long has his memory been deteriorating?" she asked after another moment.

"Since last Christmas," Severus answered truthfully.

"And none of you thought maybe it prudent that his primary healer, me, know about this!" she screeched. "I could have resolved this issue last year, before it became a problem had I known about it!" The two men both looked at their feet, feeling quite chastised. "Sirius, you I expect would let Harry do whatever he wants, but Severus, you know better!"

Sirius was about to defend himself, but Severus beat him to it. "I didn't let the issue go unresolved, Poppy. I was giving him potions to combat the effects of the Cruciatus Curse and —"

"This has nothing to do with the Cruciatus Curse, though it certainly didn't help him any," Madam Pomfrey said irately.

"Wait, what is wrong with him?" Sirius asked again.

"I found a mass in his brain, it's what has been effecting his memories," she said heavily and the two men's eyes widened in alarm. "Now I've been able to remove it easily enough, so don't fret, but I haven't been able to determined how much of his memory was effected. He could regain them all, now that the mass has been removed, or they could never return to him. I'll know more over the next few hours."

"How is he now?" Severus asked, after taking in what she was saying.

"Disoriented, and he had a couple relapses while I was working. He thought I was a hallucination, the poor boy," she said taking in a deep

breath and then let it out. "Regardless of how he is in the next couple hours, I'm keeping him here until we know for definite, one way or the other."

Severus nodded in agreement. "May we see him?"

Madam Pomfrey looked hesitant at that. "Until he recovers a firmer grasp on his memories, I'm going to have to say no." The two men opened their mouths to protest, but the Medi-Witch held up her hand. "He seems to be focusing mostly on his capture and before then. He believes the both of you dead and harbors a fair amount of guilt for both of your deaths. Right now, I'm not sure how he will react seeing you two. I don't want him to lash out at you again. However defective his memories are at the moment, he is still the Protector of Hogwarts," she said seriously.

Severus nodded reluctantly. "You are correct."

"What about Remus?" Sirius asked. "From what Harry has told us, he was alive up through Harry's capture. I don't like leaving him alone in his state, and Remus might be able to help instill some concrete memories. Also, from what I saw, I think he's more likely to believe him right now, over us."

Madam Pomfrey nodded. "That is probably a very good idea. In fact, it may be wise for him to see only those he knows alive, at least until recent memories resurface."

"I'll contact, Remus then, tell him to come back to the school," Sirius said and made to leave the Hospital Wing.

"Sirius, don't tell him what has happened until he arrives. I don't want Dumbledore aware of this yet," Severus said seriously and Sirius nodded before leaving.

"Why don't you want Albus to know?" Madam Pomfrey asked.

"He doesn't always have Harry's best interest at heart. It will only give him another excuse to put Harry under lock and key. I won't allow it!" he answered severely and turned to leave the infirmary himself. "I'll

be in my lab, I'm going to see what I can make to help Harry's memories return more quickly."

Madam Pomfrey nodded as she watched him go and then she turned back to the curtained off area where Harry was resting behind a silencing ward. She hoped his memories returned quickly. She glanced to her right, to the miniature Basilisk curled up on one of the beds, looking at her. "Oh don't look at me like that. I'll have him back to himself as soon as possible. I'm only one person for Merlin's sake," she muttered and walked away.

Mortedolv simply blinked at her, not understanding a word she just said.

--

A/N: Sorry, for the delay with this chapter, I hadn't expected it to take me so long to get it out.

## Chapter Forty-Nine – Apologies

Harry had been in the Hospital Wing for a few hours at the least, and for the last hour of that time, he'd been trying to figure out why he was still there. Remus had been in a couple of times to ask how he was feeling, in which he responded with an honest, "I'm fine," but he usually left after a couple of minutes, before Harry got up the nerve to ask what was going on. And he was certain that Remus was conversing with someone outside of the curtains every time he left.

Harry had tried to ask Madam Pomfrey what was wrong with him, before she had up and disappeared on him, and not returned, but hadn't gotten a chance as she'd shushed him and tucked him in like he was a little kid. Harry had been tired then, so had dozed off, but he was now tempted to just get of bed and walk through the curtain.

The only reason he was hesitant about doing so was because he couldn't remember anything past Apparating to Hogwarts. For all he knew he could have run into Death Eaters, been infected with a deadly virus, and was contagious to anyone and anything and he was going to die a horrible, horrible death!

Harry sat back with a chuckle and rolled his eyes at his own imagination. He honestly felt fine, better than fine actually, better than he'd felt in a really long time. So having a horrible contagious virus thing was probably so far out of the Quidditch Pitch, that he'd never find the Snitch. Though he still really wanted to know what had happened to him.

He looked down at the hard stone floor and then to his bare feet sticking out from under the blanket. It was going to be so cold, but he could suffer it, if only for some answers. Harry braced himself and then stood up with a wince at the freezing floor beneath his feet before he got used to it and then calmly walked through the curtain.

Harry froze as everyone else froze in what they were doing. Madam Pomfrey, Sirius, and Severus, had clearly been arguing about something. A potion, if the vial Severus was holding up was any indication. Remus was leaning against the wall a few feet away from them rubbing his head as if in pain and Mort was curled up with his



head under a pillow on the nearest bed, probably dealing with the same pain as Remus.

“What’s going on?” Harry waited for an explanation, but no one answered. In fact, they all continued to stand frozen, as if afraid to make any sudden movements. “I think I broke them,” he deadpanned and then rolled his eyes. It wasn’t the first time.

Harry walked over and picked up Mort. “What did I miss?” he asked.

“Thank you for rescuing me from their screeching, they are louder than Banshees,” Mort hissed in almost a whimper, could snakes whimper, and then tilted his head. “Are you all right?”

Harry nodded. “Yes, did I Splinch myself? Are you all right?”

“Yes, I am well, and no you did not Splinch yourself. I do not know what happened. You fell to the ground, but were disoriented. You threatened them I believe,” Mortedolv explained, pointing his tail at the Severus and Sirius.

“I did what?” Harry yelped. “Are you all right? I didn’t hurt you did I? I didn’t mean too, I’m so sorry...” Harry fell silent when the group just stood there staring at him.

Finally, Severus stepped forward. “What is the last thing you remember, Harry?” he asked cautiously.

“Apparating from Grimmauld Place,” Harry answered and then he took in the other’s weary expressions. “Oh, Merlin, I did hurt someone didn’t I? Who was it, are they all right?” Harry asked distressed. If he had hurt someone, why couldn’t he remember, and why did he do it?

“No, no, Harry, relax, you hurt no one,” Remus soothed.

Harry let out a breath of relief. “Well that’s good, but what happened, and I’m not leaving Hogwarts!” he nearly shouted the last part.

“Harry, you were never going to be expelled, so you can put that thought behind you,” Severus said gently. “I arrived just after you

collapsed. You were disoriented and didn't remember anything past being captured by Voldemort. You thought he was playing mind games with you, but I managed to talk you down and brought you here."

Harry nodded trying to remember any of that, but there was nothing. "What was wrong with me?"

"You had a mass in your brain, that's been growing since last Christmas, blocking and suppressing many of your memories. Which, I would have known about long before now if someone would have told me about his memory problems," Madam Pomfrey said simply and Harry winced slightly.

"Sorry," he muttered. "So this mass, was it like a tumor or something?" Harry asked a bit uneasily.

"A tumor in so far as it was built from an abnormal growth of cells, but it was magically based. It was probably caused by your body and magic over compensating to protect your mind while you were being held under the Cruciatus Curse. I removed it easily enough," Madam Pomfrey explained briskly.

"So it's gone?" Harry asked.

"Completely, and it seems as if your memories are intact as well?" that last was a question.

"I take it that was a concern," Harry muttered and then let out a heavy breath. "Well I'll be happy to clarify that every time I told Remus I was fine, I meant that I felt fantastic. Yes, as far as I know, all my memories are there, even the nine missing Gryffindor passwords I could have used over this last term," Harry added dryly.

Sirius chuckled. "It's good to have you back, Pup."

Harry smiled, but then frowned when something suddenly occurred to him that he had completely forgotten almost as soon as he'd learned of it. "I think know how Voldemort's going to get me out of Hogwarts!"

--

"Are you certain, Harry?" Dumbledore questioned.

"Yes, I recognized the signs. I remember I was about to come see you, and I couldn't remember why or where I was going about a corridor away from your office," Harry said running a hand over his face. "Because I couldn't remember, I left back to Gryffindor."

"So, Hannah Abbot is under the Imperious Curse?" Severus questioned and Harry nodded.

"I questioned her about it, to see if I could break its hold, or find a trigger, but she went all blank faced and then came back to herself, not remembering why she was even talking to me. Obviously she was ordered to forget if someone started asking questions, or maybe just me," Harry said with shrug.

"Well at least we know now. We'll be able to lift the curse, and Harry will be safe," Dumbledore said with a smile. "And I'm glad your memory problems are over, Harry."

"Me too, it'll be nice being able to remember the passwords into Gryffindor, and my homework assignments... and whether or not Draco Malfoy snogged me senseless in a girls' lavatory," Harry said just as his godfather was taking a sip of tea, trying not to laugh.

"What?" Sirius sputtered out in a squeak, choking on his tea and dropping his cup.

Harry doubled over laughing and Sirius glared at him. "Kidding, Sirius, I'm joking, really," he managed through his laughter.

"Well, Harry, had I known you swung that way..." Remus began mock suggestively.

"Girls, I like girls!" Harry stated firmly, nodding his head vigorously, while Dumbledore chuckled on the other side of his desk and Severus simply looked amused. "Though, I should apologize to Draco for using his name in such an untrue statement." The other four men

looked at him questioningly and Harry smiled. "Something else I forgot, I walked in on Zabini about to pounce on Draco in a rather too friendly sense; he still owes me thirty Galleons for that rescue, probably about time I collect."

"Charging to be people's savior now are you?" Sirius asked with a smirk.

"A bloke's got to make a living," Harry quipped right back and the others laughed.

While everyone was laughing around him, Harry regarded Dumbledore. He wasn't sure how he was going to deal with him. He didn't think Dumbledore understood the seriousness of banishing a Protector from Hogwarts. Especially one who was so entrenched in Hogwarts' magic. This was something, Harry was certain Voldemort knew, had felt.

Harry remembered back to his second year, his first second year, when he'd witness Tom's memory through the diary. He was much too concerned about the school closing after his actions. He must have understood that if a student died, they would close Hogwarts, but after Myrtle had been killed, he was afraid of it actually happening. He had felt it then for the first time and remedied the problem by framing Hagrid.

At first when Harry had become Protector, and realized that Voldemort had been one too, he had assumed that Voldemort had tried to get a job at Hogwarts only so he could have access to the magical current for longer, but now, Harry was certain it was also because Voldemort could feel his connection with Hogwarts dying.

Hogwarts was sentient, Harry firmly believed that now. If a Protector were to walk away of their own free will, which many had probably done in the past, they probably felt a sense of loss, but otherwise there was no effect on the school or the Protector. But to be taken away against one's will, against the schools will, it could be detrimental, not only to Harry, which Harry wasn't too concerned about, but also to the school itself.

When he had been taken away for break, Harry hadn't felt it, probably because he knew he was going to return, but when he thought that he was being expelled, Harry had felt panic like he'd never conceived before. He had felt his tether with Hogwarts weakening, and it had been the most horrible thing he had ever felt.

Harry narrowed his eyes at the Headmaster as the laughter around him subsided. Threats weren't likely to work, but Dumbledore had to understand. He had to know what he had almost done, with just a simple suggestion.

"Harry, are you all right?" Severus asked.

Harry stood up and looked around at the Professors once before turning his glare on Dumbledore. "The next time you have even a miniscule thought about taking me out of Hogwarts. I suggest you think very hard on that decision and then dismiss it," he said simply and then walked out of the room. He'd let them stew over that for a couple of days. They were bound to question him by then anyways.

--

It wasn't long before school resumed. Poor Hannah had been distraught when they'd brought her out of the Imperious Curse and decided to stay away from Hogwarts for the remainder of the year. Harry felt bad for the girl and even worse when she'd apologized to him before she'd left. He'd tried to tell her that there was nothing to apologize for, that it wasn't her fault, but she wouldn't believe him. She felt as if she should have been able to fight the curse.

Remus, Sirius, and Severus, had all apologized to Harry the morning after their meeting in Dumbledore's office, even though keeping him from Hogwarts hadn't been their decision. Dumbledore still hadn't. Harry believed that the Headmaster understood to some extent now, what he'd almost done, but the man had the odd habit of doing things for the Greater Good that had very little good intention with those involved.

Harry decided to keep an eye on Dumbledore, regardless. It wasn't hard with the majority of the paintings all taking orders from him if he

wanted them to, and the ghosts seemed to hold a soft spot for him. Not to mention the spy mirror in the Chamber that let Harry see any location in Hogwarts. Harry figured that if he knew what Dumbledore was planning ahead of time, then he'd have just that more time to thwart the plan, if his intentions were skewed of course. He certainly didn't want to impede the man's ability to stopping Death Eater attacks.

Harry was on his way down to Potions just over a month into the new term when Draco stopped him and pulled him into an empty classroom. "Mordant's been asking questions about you. I think she spent more time talking about you then actually teaching today."

"What kind of questions?" Harry questioned.

"The kind that guarders your movements when not in classes and I think she might be close to finding out about The Club as well," Draco answered.

"Shit, that woman just doesn't know how to leave well enough alone."

"Do you want us to do something about it?" Draco asked.

"Us, as in the Slytherins?" asked Harry. "I don't think threatening her would go over well, Draco."

Draco rolled his eyes. "I meant we could lead her astray."

Harry suddenly smirked and a mischievous twinkle came into his eyes. "Grawp," he whispered.

"Who?" asked Draco a bit uneasily.

"Hagrid's little brother, you could say," Harry said with a laugh and then went on to detail his plan. Draco, of course, thought he had gone crazy, but for his own amusement decided to go along with it. Harry didn't want to get Hagrid in trouble, so his plan involved Hagrid knowing what was going on. Draco had almost refused at that, until Harry told him that he'd be the one to explain the plan to the half Giant. Hagrid was a bit put off by the woman as it was, so Harry didn't

think he'd have too much of an issue with it. It certainly would get Mordant to stop investigating where they didn't want her to.

Harry left a short while later and made it into Potions just before the Professor swept into the room. Harry kept a satisfied smirk on his lips the entire class and Mordant was looking slightly uneasy by the time she dismissed class a few minutes early.

--

"Harry Potter, I cannot believe you did that to her!" Harry sat a few days later, cowering under Professor McGonagall's glare.

"She deserved it and she was going to find out about The Club. She would have exposed it to Dumbledore, just to spite me and spun it in a way that would have gotten me into trouble, I'm sure. You know she would," Harry add meekly.

"She's been in the Hospital Wing for the last day downing Calming Draughts!"

Harry shrunk down a bit. "The Centaurs were not my fault. How could I have predicted that they'd come out at that exact moment? Or that she's be that afraid of them. I mean they didn't even harm us, only threatened us a bit."

"I have in mind to revoke your Animagus lessons."

Harry's eyes widened. "No please, I'm so close to being able to complete my form. Give me a year's worth detentions, take points, anything but my lessons," Harry begged.

McGonagall glared at him for a moment longer before sighing. "All right, detention for a month, to be served with Professor Mordant."

"Is that a wise idea?" Harry shrunk down some more with a wince at her narrowed eyes. "Right, of course it is."

“And a hundred points from Gryffindor,” she said with a slight wince of her own. Harry could only nod, the others weren’t going to like this. “You can go, and send in your Slytherin cohorts.”

Harry nodded and stood from his seat, just before the door he turned back. “Go easy on them, it was all my idea, they only went along with it.”

“I’ll take that into consideration, Mister Potter. Now leave me before I change my mind about the lessons.”

Harry nodded again and scrambled out of the office. He winced when he saw the four Slytherin’s sitting outside. “Don’t provoke her, she’s not in a very good mood,” he whispered. “Just take your punishment and leave it at that,” Harry advised. Draco looked a bit wary as he and his fellow Slytherin’s shuffled into the room.

Just before the door was closed behind them, Severus stepped out of the shadows. “You’re grounded,” he growled and then walked away.

Draco stared over his shoulder at Harry, showing the same disbelief Harry was feeling. He gave Harry a sympathetic glance before closing the door. Harry scrambled after Severus. “How can you ground me? We live in a castle? I don’t think I’ve never been grounded before!”

“Oh, perhaps then it’s about time that you were. And believe me, I’ll figure out a way,” Severus said heatedly.

“I’m sorry, it was supposed to be a harmless prank,” Harry said quietly, still following Severus.

“Harmless! You could have gotten yourself killed! You could have gotten the others killed!” Severus shouted, turning on Harry. “And you got Hagrid involved. Dumbledore is still trying to decide whether or not to let him go from his teaching position.”

Harry took a step back. “What?”



"I know you are just trying to be a kid, and I don't blame you for it. But your actions have consequences," Severus said lightly. "I know you know this, but sometimes, I think you need to be reminded of that." Severus turned to continue on his way. "Come on, it's up to you to save Hagrid's job."

Harry followed with a heavy sigh. He didn't mean to have everything go so askew. Severus was correct though, he hadn't thought at all about the possible consequences. He'd let himself become rather careless since Christmas break. Going into the forest at all had been a bad idea. All of them easily could have been attacked by Death Eaters while they were outside of the wards and Professor Mordant really didn't look very well when they'd returned to the castle.

--

The next morning, Harry knocked on Mordant's office door and then waited for the Professor to open it. She glared at him when she realized who it was at her door. "What is it you want, Potter?"

"I wanted to apologize," Harry said lightly. His guilt had only grown since the day before and after he'd talked Dumbledore into keeping Hagrid and his brother, he'd resolved to apologizing to Professor Mordant.

"If you are here because the Headmaster is making you..."

"No, he doesn't know I'm here, no one does," Harry said, not meeting the Professor's eyes.

"Awfully trusting, and how do you know I won't retaliate for what you did to me yesterday?" Mordant asked coldly and Harry raised his eyes to meet hers.

"Well, I'd hope that with whatever problems you have with me, that you wouldn't resort to my level of petty revenge," Harry said guiltily.

"Really now, you seem to hold me in much higher regard than I thought," she said, glaring back at him. After a long moment, she

opened her door further and walked back into her office. "I accept your apology, come in and close the door."

Harry hesitated a moment before walking into the office and closing the door behind him. "I really am sorry, and if you feel that you want to add anything onto the punishment that Professor McGonagall gave me yesterday, I'll understand and accept it."

"Take a seat." Harry sunk into the chair in front of her desk. "You disappoint me, you should have figured it out by now," she said simply, sitting across from him.

Harry frowned. "I'm sorry?" he asked cautiously.

"I've been testing you since the beginning of the year. You were supposed to try and get rid of me months ago, but you are obviously more tolerant than either of us could have guessed. It made much more sense to us after you revealed that you are from a different time and the Protector."

"What?" Harry asked in confusion.

"Dumbledore hired me to see if the Blood Pact the Potter Family made was still intact within you," Mordant stated as if Harry should know what she was talking about.

"What Blood Pact?" Harry asked carefully, sitting up a bit straighter in his seat.

"You don't know?" she asked, a bit shocked. "After you revealed who you were, Albus assumed you already knew."

"I don't know. What Blood Pact, Professor?" Harry practically demanded.

Mordant looked at Harry a bit lost and then sighed out heavily. "The first set of male twins were born into the Potter Family just over five hundred years ago. The heir to the Potter Family was still chosen through the first-born son at that time. The twins fought over the title as neither knew who the true heir was. They nearly destroyed the

family. Their younger brother got caught in the cross fire and the twins were devastated. To ensure that fighting could never be possible within the family again, they took a Blood Pact, making it impossible for members of the family to harm, to the point of death, one of their own. Part of the Pact was a compulsion that made it very hard for one member of the family to treat another of the family badly. It's possible to ignore the compulsion, but difficult."

Understanding dawned on Harry rather quickly. "And you've been testing me all school year to see if I could retaliate against you, which means we're related..."

Mordant nodded with a bit of guilt in her eyes. "Yes, Harry, we are related. I was your father's cousin, your second cousin," she said quietly. "I am sorry for what I've put you through this school year. I didn't want to, but Albus insisted that it was necessary, and for your safety."

"Who else knows about this?" Harry asked, standing to pace; feeling more comfortable moving at the moment.

"Only, Albus, as far as I know," Mordant answered truthfully.

"Why did he want me tested?" Harry asked, stopping in his tracks and looking at his... cousin.

"I don't know, he didn't tell me, Harry. He only gave me weekly instructions that I was to follow. Things that would provoke you mostly," she said honestly. "After you revealed who you were, he instructed me to stop what I was doing, I don't know why, but after break, he instructed me to watch you."

Harry looked away from Mordant and at his feet. "I know why, but he shouldn't," Harry said quietly. "Especially if he had you start this at the beginning of the school year. Only I knew about the split in the Slytherin line, and the changing of name, and I only found that out recently. He knew I was related to Voldemort before I revealed it."

--

A/N: Only a few more chapters to go.

CHP 51